



**** "A GROUNDBREAKING NEW FILM"

TILDA COBHAM-HERVEY

52 TUESDAYS

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Contents September 2015





Out of this world

Aleksei German's apocalyptic vision of life on a distant planet, 'Hard to Be a God', took him almost 50 years to make and is the logical culmination of a brilliant career. By **Michael Brooke**

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The S&S Interview: John Waters

For almost half a century the director has provided a beacon for the maladjusted and misunderstood – and been a *bête noire* for puritans. But while the BFI's forthcoming retrospective in London might seem to grant a veneer of later-life respectability to the pope of trash, don't imagine he's lost any of his mischievous ability to shock and offend. Interview by **Kim Morgan**

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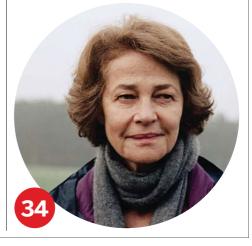
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His reputation rests on classic tales of poverty and struggle in post-war Italy, such as *Bicycle Thieves*, but in a career that spanned more than 30 films as director and 150 as an actor, there is so much more that deserves our attention. By **Pasquale lannone**





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John Waters © Retts Wood/Eyevine Image retouched by DawkinsColour Lettering by Sarah J. Coleman at inkymole.com

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Editorial Nick James



A CERTAIN TENDENCY IN BRITISH CINEMA

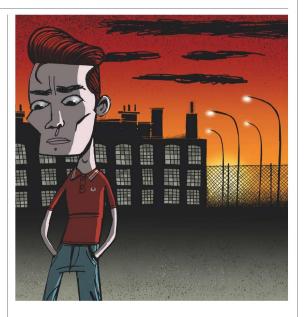
The protagonist will be a pretty young girl or boy in fraught domestic circumstances who will not be given to smiling but will have a fashion sense that makes the best of cheap clothes. The film will offer sympathy for them from the outset: the camera will caress freckled skin and eyes with long lashes, mournful electronic music will urge the message that this is a person blocked into tragedy by their very limited means. The grimness of their post-industrial surroundings will be ameliorated by magic-hour natural light and by a low sun winking behind unused warehouses.

At night our luckless hero/heroine will find brief comforts – cadged food and drink, a ride on a motorbike or car, sometimes an open-topped one – framed by diadems of out-of-focus street lighting, or dazzled by the tawdry glamour of an amusement arcade, from which they may even scam money. The audience will be pressed to like him/her no matter how feckless their behaviour because they will be under the constant threat of violence from nasty local men, possibly relatives; the authorities will interfere from time to time. There will be somebody nice on hand to offer an alternative – it could be an exuberant gay youth, a solid young father/mother figure, or a semi-corrupted sister/brother trying to prevent her/his sister/brother from making the same mistakes as her/him.

What I'm describing here constitutes as much a tribute as a complaint. Some of these elements have appeared in some of the best British films of recent years, but as a long-term British film watcher I find that the above palette of touches now needs to be handled with much greater care, for it is becoming a set of clichés. There's a sub-strata of British films made with the best intentions – some were in evidence at the recent Edinburgh International Film Festival – that sees this aesthetic framing as native to this kind of subject matter. Since it's been more a creeping tendency than a deliberate policy – though noticeable for some years – it would be unfair to pick on individual filmmakers or films, but I'm sure most of you will get what I mean.

It's not my intention to discourage particular filmmakers and I'm not arguing against making films about young Brits suffering hard times — people in their twenties have probably not had it so bad since the days of rationing in the early post-war period. If anything, we need more films about them, but

Given the hardship that these tough times visit on poorer people, we need a more angry, surprising, realistically complex British social realist cinema than we've been getting



ones that are more culturally and ethnically diverse, less sentimental, employ stronger narratives and visual innovation and allow their subjects more depth of character, ambiguity, agency and urgency than those I'm describing. At their worst, such films wrap their subjects in an aura of fuzzy sympathy, yet hardly ever show them making hard decisions for fear of undermining the power of the difficulties they face or how deeply they're affected by them.

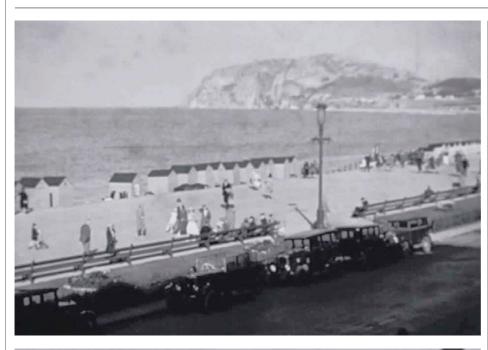
This is a mistake Ken Loach never makes; his protagonists push back for what they need, whether they succeed or not. But the kind of cinema Loach helped to establish, and was furthered brilliantly by the likes of Lynne Ramsay, Carine Adler, Andrea Arnold, Clio Barnard and many others is perhaps now too reverent. The worst of the new British social realist films offer an indulgent wallowing version of the achievements of the talents above. It's understandable, because much of the British filmmaking community sees this area as their natural habitat, and you can see that film festivals abroad—particularly Cannes—prefer British films that stay more or less within the genre's boundaries.

But surely, given the hardship that these tough times visit on poorer people, we need a more angry, surprising, realistically complex social realist cinema than we've been getting. It's almost as if much of social realism has become risk-averse, that it doesn't want to offend anyone, only to plead or mourn generally for the victims of dark forces in the world. Maybe it will take just one powerful and vividly different film to dispel this feeling of a slightly worn-out iconography. But until that film comes along, this kind of British social realism feels like it needs regenerating. §

Rushes

IN THE FRAME

I DO LIKE TO BE BESIDE THE SEASIDE





'Come unto these yellow sands': two scenes from Llandudno 'The Naples of the North' (1938)

Through the Britain on Film archive, you can stay at home while enjoying holidays in the foreign country that is the past

By Carol Morley

Guests and staff gather outside the hotel, posing as though for a photograph. A child sitting on the balcony balustrade nearly slips from her mother's hands, arousing gentle amusement from others. This is part of the advertising film *Llandudno "The Naples of the North"* (1938, 6 mins), which I showed my Auntie Sally on a recent visit to North Wales.

My maternal grandma was born on Anglesey and my auntie now lives in Llandudno, though she has never before heard it compared to Naples. On her computer we viewed the black-and-white film, scratched and sparkled with age. The plummy male commentator occasionally stumbled over words, indicating that he probably had only one chance at recording his script. He managed to get his mouth around the following sentence though: "The appointments of the house conduce to the greatest comforts combined with organised service." Auntie Sally chuckled, "Oh, I did like those old voices," she said.

Many of the hotels that are shown still remain, defying the rush of people going abroad for their holidays. But my auntie noticed the now vanished beach huts, the once beautiful Pier Pavilion Theatre – left to dereliction and an arson attack. The commentator quotes Shakespeare – "Come unto these yellow sands" – but the natural yellow sand has almost disappeared from Llandudno's West Shore. This, according to my auntie, is because of the unnecessary addition of rocks for sea defences.

Swimmers of all ages, in their prim and proper bathing costumes, run towards the camera, look inquisitively into the lens and wave to us from another time. The commentator says, "Here is another jolly crowd – I'd love to be amongst them – wouldn't you?" And in that moment the answer is yes, and yet watching historically we are in a position to know what downturns many of them have lived through and what soon awaits them. But for now they, and we, are in the moment, in the wonderfully titled 'Naples of the North'.

I decide to visit another seaside town –



Encounters Film Festival

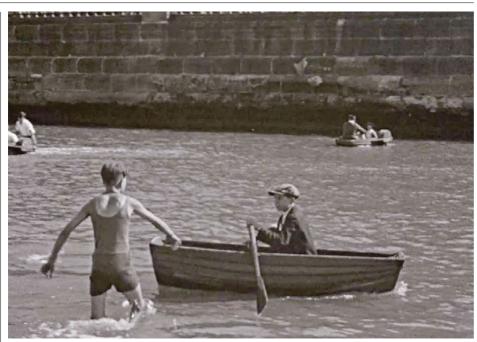
The largest UK showcase of short film and animation returns from 15-20 September in Bristol. Highlights include a retrospective unearthing Ursula Meier's shorts while the 219-strong international competition includes new animations from Don Hertzfeldt ('World of Tomorrow', right) and Richard Williams ('Prologue'), as well as programmes dedicated to documentary and female representation.



The Colour of Money

This timely season at the Barbican, London (10-20 September), exploring how cinema has critiqued money, spans new documentaries and classics such as Robert Bresson's 'L'Argent' and Djibril Diop Mambéty's 'Hyenas', not forgetting a double bill of Mervyn Leroy's 1933 musical 'Gold Diggers of 33' and Sally Potter's radical debut 'The Golddiggers'.





On the waterfront: Enid Briggs's Broadstairs and Margate Items (1930)

Margate, in Kent, where I spent a fortnight's holiday every year as a child at Grandma Morley's house. This time it's a virtual visit only, but I discover *Broadstairs and Margate Items* (1930, 21 mins) by amateur filmmaker Enid Briggs. Enid lived in a cliff-top house in Broadstairs with her mother and sister, and her 16mm silent films are fascinating glimpses into the well-off lives of her family and friends.

Enid constructed her images with military precision, which makes sense since she was once in the Women's Royal Naval Service. She doesn't merely follow her subjects; she composes scenes and creates sequences. We



Workers Leaving T&W Lees of Stockport (1901)

see horses on the carless roads and boats on the glistening water, concluding with the steamer drawing close to Margate pier.

Finally, I allow myself one more film before I get back to contemporary life, and decide to look at *Workers Leaving T&W Lees of Stockport* (1901, 1 min), which shows a hat factory in my hometown. I am surprised by how small some of the child workers are, so I look up the labour laws of the time. I discover that while in 1901 the legal age to start work was 12, it was acceptable that children as young as five had part-time jobs.

I watch the film repeatedly, so densely packed with activity is the locked-off wide frame, so full of secrets and pleasures if we take the time to revisit. A boy throwing his flat cap into the air and catching it, a little girl skipping – all the more fascinating and poignant because they are no longer children, they are no longer alive. I can't imagine the images that proliferate on social media will ever seem as precious as these.

A direct message appears on Facebook. It's Auntie Sally letting me know she can't wait to spend more time travelling through the Britain on Film online archive, visiting all the places she's ever been, or wanted to go. §

The Britain on Film archive can be explored at bfi.org.uk/britain-on-film

LISTOMANIA GRAPHIC NOVEL FILMS

The Diary of a Teenage Girl and Gemma Bovery are two releases this month that started as graphic novels, joining a burgeoning tradition.

Ghost World (2001)

Terry Zwigoff

Road to Perdition (2002)

Sam Mendes

American Splendor (2003)

Shari Springer Berman, Robert Pulcini

A History of Violence (2005)

David Cronenberg

Sin City (2005)

Frank Miller, Robert

Rodriguez, Quentin Tarantino

Persepolis (2007, below)

Marjane Satrapi, Vincent Paronnaud
Kick-Ass (2009)

Matthew Vaughn

Blue Is the Warmest Colour (2013)

Abdellatif Kechiche

Snowpiercer (2013)
Bong Joon-ho

We Are the Best! (2013)

Lukas Moodysson



QUOTE OF THE MONTH GEORGES FRANJU



A Tribute to Cannon Films

The recent documentary 'Electric Boogaloo' revisited the glory days of the Cannon empire. Now, courtesy of the Badlands Collective, you can see films such as Andrei Konchalovsky's 'Runaway Train' and 'Shy People' (right) on 35mm, in three double bills at various London cinemas throughout September. For more information, visit badlands-collective.com



For Ever Amber

Since the 1970s, the Amber Film and Photography collective has been documenting the lives of working-class and marginalised communities in north-east England, in films such as Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's 1983 'Byker' (right). Its archive is the subject of a long-overdue celebration at the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle until 19 September and the Tyneside Cinema until 30 September. Visit the 'Sight & Sound' website to read Neil Young's essay on the collective.



HEARING AIDS

Headphones can isolate a character in a film, but they can also help create a special intimacy between them and the audience in the stalls



By Hannah McGill

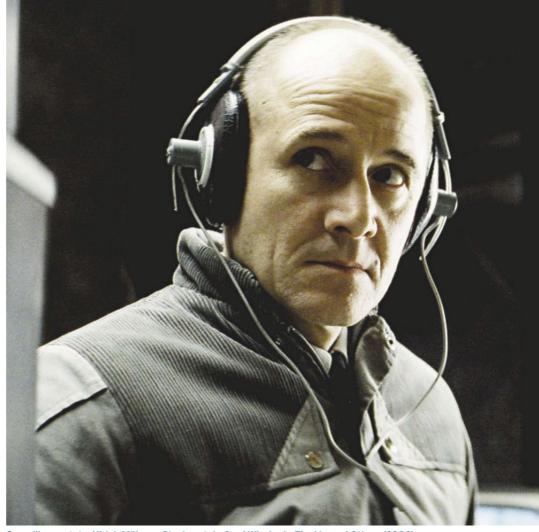
How much privacy do movie characters have? Depending upon how much access the script grants us to their interiority, they can

hide their thoughts, keep their true motivations to themselves, or – like Gilda in the eponymous film of 1946 and Keyser Söze in The Usual Suspects (1995) – lie to us outright. And depending upon the relationship they've been granted with the fourth wall, they can manipulate what we get to see, as when Fatty Arbuckle directs the camera away while he changes clothes in The Knockout (1914); or dismiss us altogether, as when Ferris Bueller addresses the remaining audience after the credits have rolled in Ferris Bueller's Day Off (1986): "You're still here? It's over. Go home."

A further means of emphasising, preserving or breaking a character's subjective relationship with a film's reality is via what he or she is hearing. A character wearing headphones either shuts out the audience along with the rest of the people in the film; or shares an intimate auditory experience with the audience, to the exclusion of the film's other characters. In Morvern Callar (2001) the protagonist walks through a jumping nightclub throng while her personal stereo, and the film's soundtrack, replaces techno with The Mamas & the Papas' 'Dedicated to the One I Love'. While one doubts that such effective headphones exist, it's still a striking scene. The electro that Tom listens to in *The Beat That My Heart Skipped* (2005) helps him to block out what's troubling him, and to feel, at happy moments, like the hero of his own movie; but it serves to emphasise his solitude when he passes his headphones over to his father only to have his taste in music mocked.

Often, the separation from one's environment created by a private, personalised soundtrack is used for comic effect, as when Eddie Murphy's Reggie sings along to The Police in 48 Hrs. (1982); or when Julia Roberts as Vivian in Pretty Woman (1990) is too absorbed in listening to Prince to notice that her bathtime is being disturbed.

Privacy and intimate listening have different resonances, however, in The Lives of Others (2006), the enduring image from which is not so much either of its beautiful lovers, but the mousy Stasi captain assigned to listen in on their conversations, his balding pate encircled by his headphones. Listening to his targets, playwright Georg Dreyman (Sebastian Koch) and his actress girlfriend Christa-Maria Sieland (Martina Gedeck), becomes both a source of vicarious thrills and a political re-education for Gerd Wiesler (Ulrich Mühe). His headphones, intended as the tools with which he will entrap and punish the couple, instead become his connection to their more vivid existence, their wiring an umbilical cord through which he feeds on their life force and participates in their affair.



Surveillance state: Ulrich Mühe as Stasi captain Gerd Wiesler in The Lives of Others (2006)

As Wiesler becomes emotionally enmeshed in the troubled liaison between Georg and Christa-Maria – and begins to transgress his professional boundaries by intervening in it – director Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck blurs the lines between what Wiesler is hearing through his headphones, what another person in the room with him would be able to hear, and what is audible to Georg and Christa-Maria themselves. Here, as in *The Conversation* (1974), *Blow Out* (1981) and Berberian Sound Studio (2011), sound has a direct route to the deepest consciousness - and the power to alter it. "For the viewer," writes Lutz

Wiesler's own subjectivity to be dissolved by the very intensity of his engagement. Just as official surveillance has merged private and public space, and intimate dialogue with matters of state, so Wiesler has been able to trespass on the private

solitary listener."



Samantha Morton in Morvern Callar (2001)



Koepnick in *The Lives of Others and Contemporary* German Film: A Companion, "sound suddenly

appears liberated from the spaces of its origin;

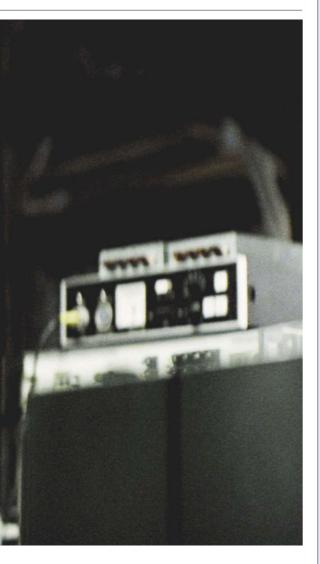
it becomes audible in the image even if Wiesler,

due to his headset, is pictured as a privileged and

As Wiesler's listening apparatus has pierced

Georg's privacy, so von Donnersmarck allows

Julia Roberts in Pretty Woman (1990)



In 'The Lives of Others' Wiesler has trespassed on the private territory of an affair and disturbed the cold space of his inner life

territory of a love affair, and Georg and Christa-Maria have disturbed the cold space of his inner life. The technology that has enabled him to betray them has made it impossible for him to do so; the intimacy it has permitted has turned them into his imagined friends, if not lovers.

A fantasy, writes Anna Funder, author of the 2003 study of the East German police state *Stasiland*: "The film doesn't accurately portray the way totalitarian systems work, because it needs to leave room for its hero to act humanely (something such systems are designed to prevent)." But if *The Lives of Others* isn't an accurate portrayal of the mindset of a Stasi operative (any more than *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*—incidentally, another story of a meek third party learning from a relationship between more charismatic others—is a factual reconstruction of anyone's schooldays), nevertheless Wiesler's headphones lend us the means to spy on experience that transcends the specific. §

THE FIVE KEY...

NEO-SCREWBALLS

As *Mistress America* hits the big screen, we celebrate other descendants of the high-spirited, fast-talking comedies of the 1930s

By Adam Nayman

When Mistress America (reviewed on page 64) premiered earlier this year at Sundance, critics began heaving the S-word around like Major League pitchers warming up in the bullpen: rare was the review that didn't refer to Noah Baumbach's latest as a 'screwball' comedy. The label was also attached to the director's previous collaboration with Greta Gerwig, Frances Ha (2012), but for all the charms of these films, there is more to the genre than fleet storytelling and dizzy heroines; from My Man Godfrey (1936) to The Palm Beach Story (1942), true screwball comedies have tackled class and gender roles, and skewered taboos. That nobly ignoble tradition is upheld in the titles cited here.



Desperately Seeking Susan (1985)A bored hausfrau yearns to bloom into a hothouse flower in Susan Seidelman's endearingly shaggy mistaken-identity farce, which unfolds in a funky daydream version of New York City; Madonna was never better cast than as an obscure object of desire whose aura is like a tractor beam pulling in weirdos of all stripes. Bonus points for being inspired by Rivette's *Celine and Julie Go Boating* (1974).



4 Smiley Face (2006)
The convolutions that lead to Anna Faris scattering a copy of the Communist Manifesto to the winds of Southern California are too numerous to recount here; suffice it to say that Gregg Araki's wonderful pothead picaresque honours the complex plotting of vintage screwballs while also anticipating the nonsequitur fecklessness of Apatow-era comedies big screen and small.



1 A New Leaf (1970)

In her debut feature Elaine May cast herself as a lovelorn heiress – both tipping her cap and thumbing her nose to the likes of *Bringing up Baby*, replacing Katharine Hepburn's boisterous energy with a painful meekness. As the scheming husband who wants her dead, Walter Matthau is hilariously wary – a man who's never more miserable than when contemplating the idea of happily ever after.



Raising Arizona (1987)
In their second feature, Joel and Ethan Coen took the miracle out of Morgan's Creek, to an America reeling from having "that sumbitch Reagan in the White House". Where Preston Sturges used sextuplets to herald post-World War II prosperity, the brothers use a quintet of babies to tempt barren strivers Nicolas Cage and Holly Hunter, who just want to take a little something – or somebody – back to the trailer park.



Wanderlust (2012)
David Wain's marvellous and unappreciated spoof of communal living neatly satirises downsizing city mice Paul Rudd and Jennifer Aniston, while suggesting that their wet, hot summer idyll in 'Elysium' is its own faux-boho aspirational trap; imagine Mr. Blandings trying to build a dream house where none of the rooms are allowed to have doors – not even the bathroom.

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MEDIA

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ALTERED STATES

A practical decision to film for just one day a week over a year created the unusual form for Sophie Hyde's coming-of-age drama 52 Tuesdays

By Sophie Mayer

Australian filmmaker Sophie Hyde leapt into international consciousness when she won a directing award at Sundance in 2014 for her first fiction feature 52 Tuesdays. She had previously visited the festival in 2011 with her collective Closer Productions, as producer of the documentary Shut Up Little Man! An Audio *Misadventure*; in between, her first documentary feature *Life in Movement*, about a choreographer who died in her prime, was nominated for two Australian Film Institute awards.

52 Tuesdays, a family drama for the Facebook era, echoes the documentaries' curiosity about how life is crafted by communities and technologies, as it follows a year in the life of 16-year-old Billie (Tilda Cobham-Hervey) after her mother Jane (Del Herbert-Jane) announces that she is transitioning and will now be known as James. Sent to live with her father, but meeting up with her mother for a couple of hours every Tuesday, Billie also starts to explore the changes in her own life by making a video diary charting her sexual awakening through her relationship with two older friends, Jasmin and Josh.

Sophie Mayer: 52 Tuesdays has a unique production process and narrative. Which came first?

Sophie Hyde: The idea for 52 *Tuesdays* came from the form. My partner Bryan [Mason] is the cinematographer and editor of the film, and we have a daughter. We had the idea of a story where two people would meet every Tuesday, because we wanted to film only on Tuesdays for a year [working around childcare]. We needed to find characters that would help us dramatically, that had the promise of change, but also people who challenged the rules about how we live. I'd been trying to decide what to show of myself to my daughter, and when: I feel like I had the great privilege of meeting my parents as real people at a young age. SM: I imagine you've been asked a lot about the resonances between the film

SH: We were at the same Sundance as *Boyhood*, so we didn't know much about it beforehand. We do get asked about it, particularly the sense of time passing. My first university lecture was about the Seven Up! series, and I remember asking: how much is the filming influencing the subjects? With the kid in Boyhood, I was fascinated by how much he was influenced by being in the film, and how much he then influenced the film.

SM: Did Tilda Cobham-Hervey influence the film over the year of shooting?

and Richard Linklater's Boyhood...

SH: We had imagined it would be a very evenly balanced double storyline, and it felt like it really needed to lean towards the child's point of view. Certain people, in collaborating, draw in new ideas in such a strong way - the way the teenagers [Billie, Jasmin and Josh] interacted, for example. It's a really great



Once upon a time in Australia: Sophie Hyde

pleasure to have a film where you can respond to that: you don't get to do that very often.

Billie started filming [her meetings with Jasmin and Josh] because we were interested in a mirroring between her and James, as he's filming the change that he has effected. Tilda was less sexually experienced than we had first imagined her character, so we wanted to separate Tilly – and Billie – from that experience, with the camera. It worked because they're both curious and direct, so it felt natural to have her behind the camera asking the questions.

SM: Though we don't see her taping them, Billie records to-camera confessions that structure the film. Was that planned from the start?

SH: The to-camera video diaries came much later in the filmmaking, out of a need for Billie to express something to Jasmin. The story was originally told without any big markers of time, although there was always time present. It was certainly important to us to mark out the physical change [of Billie growing up, and James transitioning not in a

I want room for discovery in my filmmaking – spontaneity, mistakes and serendipity – not just what's in my head



Love triangle: 52 Tuesdays

Hollywood version, but what it actually looks like: it's incremental. When we first cut it we felt that not everybody would recognise how time was working, and one result was that we pushed the to-camera pieces into the story. SM: I was really struck by the film's investigation

of time present and time passing, where change takes place between them, and how we use recording technologies to mark it. **SH:** We're all fascinated by time at our company

[Closer]: by recording and by time. We're just releasing a documentary, which I produced, called Stan Klemke's Time Machine [directed by Matthew Batel, about a man who has been recording his life since 1977, paralleling his video diaries with the journey of [the Nasa space probe] Voyager. Stan's very raw, he's obsessive but also aware. Matt talks about him as the punk B-side of the Voyager gold record.

SM: Will your next project as director be documentary or fiction, or somewhere between? 52 Tuesdays feels like it has elements of both.

SH: The process of making drama is so enjoyable from a selfish point of view: to take what you think and know, put pressure on it in dramatic situations, and craft a story that says something about the world. With documentary, you have a deep responsibility to your subjects and the people around them, but also to the audience - there can be a tension there. I thought I wouldn't have that with 52 Tuesdays, but then I worked with people for an entire year, and I was completely responsible to them as well.

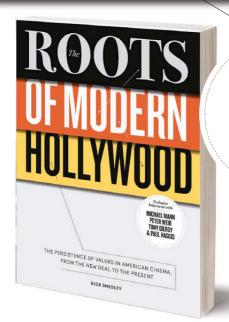
What I learned is that I want room for discovery - spontaneity, mistakes and serendipitous moments – not just what's in my head. Finding processes that satisfy that need but still offer the framework for production is a challenge. It has to feel like the rules we're imposing on ourselves are driving the story – then there's a great pleasure in creative restriction and moving outside of convention. 9



52 Tuesdays is released in UK cinemas on 7 August and is reviewed on page 74 6

FILM BOOKS INTFIFET

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SCISSOR SISTERS: PART 2

How can we explain the prevalence of female film editors in what has always been thought of, regrettably, as a boys' club?



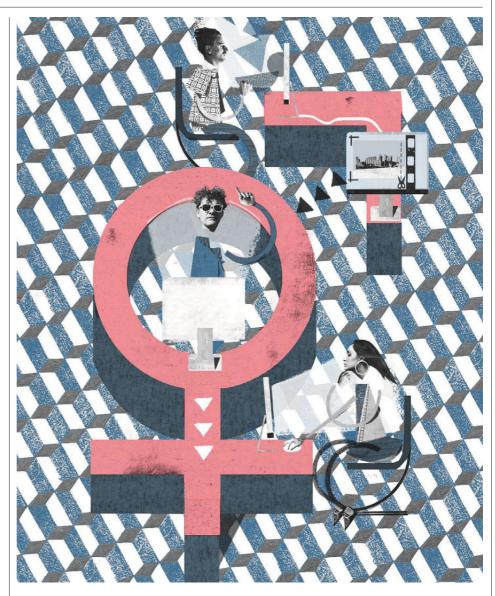
By Mark Cousins Last month I wrote about female film editors. I knew that many of the best editors have been women, but when I

looked, country by country, at the great films - Apocalypse Now, Stagecoach, The Wizard of Oz, The Elephant Man, La Grande Illusion, Army of Shadows, A Prophet, Run Lola Run, Fitzcarraldo, Waiting for Happiness, La Promesse, The Sheltering Sky, etc – my jaw sort of dropped. Film cutting in many national cinemas is substantially a girl game. The list of classic movies edited by women challenges our sense that film has mostly, regrettably, been a boy's brigade.

This raises the inevitable question: since film in general has been quite male-dominated, why is editing less so? To answer this is to risk gender stereotypes. For example, since editing is techy and systems-y, involves sitting at computers in dark rooms, and is pretty anti-social too, a clichéd image of a male comes to mind. But lots of the most techy people I know are women, and I've met many who love talking about the difference between Avid and Final Cut editing software – talk that makes me glaze over.

Look beyond the working conditions, and editing starts to look more ambiguously gendered. Technology and timelines become hyphenated with human-imaginative qualities. Let's list some of the skills a cutter needs. They're absorbers, taker-inners. They internalise what's in the rushes, and listen to the director. They need to be respectful and, at times, rebellious. They respect the script or treatment and shots and coverage, but they also think beyond these structures, imagining them reconfigured. Dede Allen, who I mentioned last month, and who edited Dog Day Afternoon, Serpico, Bonnie and Clyde and The Hustler, among many others, referred to this as seeing "intended and unintended possibilities". I like the word 'possibilities'. Editing is hoping for the film, its extension. For example, Bernardo Bertolucci had The Conformist shot in flowing crane shots, but his (male) editor Kim Arcalli cut them into bits. A kind of emasculation, you could say – pardon the gender talk – but his editing freed the film up. It cracked open its 'perfect' crane shot surface to let its steam escape.

As well as being reverent-irreverent, an editor needs to look beneath the fuselage and see things in the film that the director and writers didn't intend. They need to see the deep theme in the picture, and be moved by it and clear about it and, as it were, drag it from the film's subconscious up into its conscious. The editor is the shrink. Or, sticking with the idea of depth analysis, of theme steerage, editing is quite like writing. Another way of thinking about this is to say that editors are directors' translators. They turn what they have said in shots into what they want to say,



As well as being both reverent and irreverent, an editor needs to see things in the film that the director and writers didn't intend

in cuts. Translation is like riding two horses at once. You have to keep them running together.

Once the first cut is delivered, the editor must be patient with the chopping and changing that result from editorial notes. They shouldn't get angry or be diva-esque. Given the theme of this article, I should say that I don't use the word diva in a gendered sense. I know more boy divas than girls. And diva is close to another useful word here, 'alpha'. Editors are not usually alphas, because they sit in the edit suite with an alpha, the director. Two alphas in a room means blood on the walls. Given the theme of this article, I should say that alpha doesn't necessary mean alpha-male. An alpha is someone who can't keep their trap shut, and always has a plan. Alphas think as they speak, rather than beforehand.

What else about editors? They are often moles. They don't love limelight. Mary Lampson, who edited films for Emile de Antonio and Barbara Kopple, said, "Many good editors are sort of introverted, shy people, observers of life. They're very funny. They're ironic. And all those traits are what you need to be a good editor."

They have a sense of rhythm – sonic, but especially spatial - which those of us who aren't editors can enjoy but not replicate. Editors have pride. Often they're slow to anger (I was going to add "and rich in mercy", but that's going too far), but when cynicism or ignorance invades their camera obscura, they get mad. And there's a more political dimension, too. There are tedious aspects to editing and, in the earliest days it was seen as a mechanical job, so was quite low paid.

Absorbent, good at listening, imaginative, flexible, calm, low paid. Do these words conjure a gender for you? Are you seeing a woman when you read them, or not? My honest answer is that I know more women who have many of those qualities than men. But my editor, Timo Langer, has all of these, and some of your favourite men probably do too. They are human traits rather than female traits, surely. Maybe the answer is that editing isn't female or male. It's both.

But most of all, it ain't alpha. 69

The Industry

DEVELOPMENT TALE

THE MAN FROM U.N.C.L.E.



U.N.C.L.E. bucks: Armie Hammer as Kuryakin and Henry Cavill as Solo, with Alicia Vikander, in The Man from U.N.C.L.E.

While other 60s TV spy shows were scoring – or failing to – on the big screen, the original was still warming up on the sidelines

By Charles Gant

The Man from U.N.C.L.E. was the first American series to capture the 1960s fad for international espionage stories, arriving on TV screens in September 1964, a year or so after Dr. No reached US cinemas. It was followed a year later by I Spy and Get Smart, and in 1966 by Mission: Impossible. All three of those later TV properties have benefited from big-screen reboots in the past two decades — in films starring, respectively, Eddie Murphy, Steve Carell and Tom Cruise — but The Man from U.N.C.L.E. laboured in the slow lane. Perhaps it didn't help that, with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the story of an American spy (Napoleon Solo) teaming up with a Russian (Illya Kuryakin) no longer felt so remarkable.

In 1993, producer John Davis (*The Firm, Waterworld*) optioned the film rights, setting it up at Turner Broadcasting, commissioning screenplays from, he estimates, a dozen or so writers, including Jim and John Thomas (*Predator*, which was Davis's first movie), and John Requa and Glenn Ficara (*Bad Santa*). Quentin Tarantino flirted with the project after *Pulp Fiction*, but opted

to make Jackie Brown instead. Directors attached to The Man from U.N.C.L.E. include Matthew Vaughn (Kick-Ass), David Dobkin (Wedding Crashers) and Steven Soderbergh, who had George Clooney set to play Napoleon Solo in a script by frequent collaborator Scott Z. Burns (Contagion).

By this time, Turner had been acquired by Warner Bros, which reportedly battled with Soderbergh over the film's budget. The director departed in November 2011, and not long afterwards Warners executives sat down with Guy Ritchie and producer partner Lionel Wigram, who had delivered two profitable Sherlock Holmes films for the studio, the second released in December 2011.

"After the second Sherlock," remembers Wigram, "Warner Bros was generally looking for projects to develop with us, and what would be our next movie. There was a list of properties that they showed us, and *The Manfrom U.N.C.L.E.* was on it."

Wigram (born 1962) and Ritchie (born 1968) were both excited at the prospect of tackling the spy genre. Wigram, in fact, knew all about the project, as he had served a long stint as senior vice-president of production at Warners, beginning in 2000, before leaving to become an independent producer with a first-look deal. Coincidentally, he had also been involved with Soderbergh on two features, *The Underneath* and *The Good German*.

The screenplay Warners presented to the pair

wasn't the Burns draft, but one that had been developed for Dobkin, credited to Jeff Kleeman and David Campbell Wilson. (Both of these men retain a 'story by' credit on the resulting film, with Kleeman also credited as a producer; Dobkin is an executive producer.) Whereas many of *The Manfrom U.N.C.L.E.* screenplays had been updated to modern settings, following the *Mission: Impossible* template, this one, Wigram remembers, "was actually set in the 1960s" — the era that appealed to him and Ritchie.

As Wigram explains, "It allows us to do what we do in terms of tone. We both feel that doing period movies allows you to be grounded to some degree, but you can get away with a certain amount of fun and entertainment and licence in the period world that's harder to accept in a contemporary movie. That's the way Sherlock Holmes works. There are movies like Fast & Furious that do that sort of thing in a contemporary setting, but it doesn't work for us, for some reason. It's a subjective sensibility thing."

Wigram and Ritchie – who both also have a 'story by' credit, and are the film's joint screenwriters – came up with a wholly new origin story for U.N.C.L.E., which stands for United Network Command for Law and Enforcement. "The characters are iconic: people remember Solo and Kuryakin," Wigram says. "We thought, 'Wouldn't it be interesting to explore how they became the way they've become. What is their

backstory, which we never saw in the TV show? The KGB and CIA team up — why would they do that?' In the mid-6os, it wasn't that long after the Second World War, there were so many echoes and ripples of that time in Europe."

The origin story appealed creatively, but didn't seem such an obvious choice when Tom Cruise entered the equation to play Solo, opposite Armie Hammer as Kuryakin. Explains Wigram, "Originally we started off with the idea of doing two younger guys. We thought that was a fresh way to do it. And then, pragmatically, you think, maybe we should have one of them be older, and then we can have a movie star in it. We went down that direction. We had a very interesting couple of months working with Tom on the project, it was pretty great, but it just didn't work out." Apparently the envisaged shooting dates clashed with Cruise's commitment on *Mission: Impossible – Roque Nation*.

"Solo would have been a very different character with Cruise," Wigram adds. "We were going to do the anti-Cruise version, where Solo was extremely lazy and never wanted to get involved with action, didn't want to get dirty, didn't want to break a fingernail. He would always let the younger guy do all the work. He was the brains, and the other one was the brawn. We thought that was a funny way of going against Tom's baggage. And he loved that idea."

Before Cruise was attached, a long list of

You can get away with a certain amount of fun in the period world that's harder to accept in a contemporary movie

actors of diverse ages including Johnny Depp, Channing Tatum, Ben Affleck, Bradley Cooper, Ryan Gosling, Joel Kinnaman and Michael Fassbender had been linked to the role – some more obviously suited to an origin story than others. But with Cruise's exit in late May 2013, Warners acted quickly, plugging the gap four days later with Henry Cavill – presumably confident about the actor's prospects as Superman in Man of Steel, opening the next month. (Cavill had earlier been in consideration for the Kuryakin role won by Hammer.) Comments Wigram, "We ended up back where we started, and where creatively we really wanted to go, with Henry." Alicia Vikander, Jared Harris, Hugh Grant and Elizabeth Debicki signed up for the other key roles.

While the Cold War went off the boil as a film storyline for at least two decades, with Hollywood scouring the globe ever more imaginatively in search of credible foes, the escalating clash between the West and Putin and events in Crimea and the Ukraine brought fresh resonance to this story of two hypercompetitive ideological opposites from the USA and Russia being forced into an unholy marriage.

"It's obviously good for us that it's timely and relevant again," Wigram agrees. "It's that old adage: the more things change, the more they remain the same."



The Man from U.N.C.L.E. is released in UK cinemas on 14 August

THE NUMBERS

By Charles Gant

Having announced Amy as one of its inaugural crop of releases back in October 2013, when the film was more than 18 months away from completion, new UK distributor Altitude had plenty of time to ponder its release strategy. A documentary about Amy Winehouse from Senna director Asif Kapadia might be presumed to have guaranteed audience interest, although the challenges remained of persuading the singer's fans to see the title in cinemas, and of breaking out beyond the fanbase. The last documentary to crack £1 million at the UK box office was The Imposter, back in 2012.

For Altitude, picking the right release date was the key decision. If *Amy* was accepted into Cannes, summer offered a chance to capitalise on festival buzz, but, as Altitude distribution boss Hamish Moseley recalls, "We did ask ourselves, 'Do people want to watch such a heartbreaking film during the summertime? Would it be less risky to go into the traditional winter awards corridor?""

Eventually, the belief that "people want cultural nourishment all year round" won the day, and Altitude plumped for 3 July, going up against *Terminator: Genisys* and *Magic Mike XXL*. Competition within the indie/arthouse realm was pretty scant throughout the summer.

Co-distributing with Universal Music,
Altitude also faced the tricky decision of
whether to rush to DVD and digital platforms
– where, arguably, the film's natural audience
might have resided – or to fully exploit the
theatrical window first. The major multiplex
chains don't book films that will be arriving
on home entertainment platforms within 16.5
weeks of theatrical release. The decision had
global ramifications, since major territories,
including France and the US, had also opted
for an early July slot in cinemas, and DVD
release dates need to align internationally.

When determining the breadth of the initial release, Moseley looked at titles he had



The alcohol years: Asif Kapadia's Amy

worked on at his former company Momentum, including Control, Shame, The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo and Milk, as well as, for example, Boyhood (released by Universal). Amy went out on 133 screens, expanding in week two to 214 cinemas, and then to 254. After 17 days, its box office has cracked £2 million, which compares with £1.76 million for Senna at the same stage of its release (although Senna only went ultra-wide in its fourth week). Amy's target is Senna's lifetime total of £3.17 million.

Top cinemas for Amy, unsurprisingly, were on the indie circuit – such as Everyman, Picturehouse and Curzon – but Odeon and Vue provided five of the top 20 sites in the third week of play, and overall the film had reached more than 150 multiplexes at this stage of its release. "We always saw Amy as a film with the potential to create a mass audience for a theatrical documentary in a way that hasn't been seen in recent years," says Moseley, who adds that cinemas have reported audience applause for the film, in counterpoint to the film's gloomy final act. "Our campaign was devised to be a celebration of the music, life and legacy of a British icon, and that's what Amy also delivers."

TOP DOCUMENTARIES AT THE UK BOX OFFICE

Film	Year	Gross
Fahrenheit 9/11	2004	£6,545,552
Deep Sea 3D	2006	£3,401,475
March of the Penguins	2005	£3,314,336
Senna	2011	£3,173,400
Touching the Void	2003	£2,643,252
Amy	2015	£2,130,532*
Ghosts of the Abyss	2003	£1,790,540
Bowling for Columbine	2002	£1,667,625
TT3D: Closer to the Edge	2011	£1,339,637
The Imposter	2012	£1,134,854
Excludes concert films; *gross after 18 days		

BOX OFFICE ACTUALLY

BFI FILM FUND INSIGHTS

Not so long ago, the British romcom was big business. But after a few lean years, can the British film industry find romance again?



By Ben Roberts

It will surprise no one that the majority of new projects that come to us and that we support are dramas. We try hard to develop

other types of material, but drama is the space that emerging writer/directors tend to occupy.

We see far fewer projects that skew towards a genre: I wrote recently about a lack of strong British horror films, and we are equally starved of good comedies. A funny script from a distinctive voice is a rare thing indeed, and beyond the modest means of many independent producers.

The skill and instinct (and cost) involved in writing, directing, performing and cutting comedy is significant, and British independent films lose out as many of our best comedy writers head to TV, or America, or American TV. This is a shame, because of the long history of British comedy films, and because we've often seen the popularity and economic impact – when we get it right – of the British romantic comedy.

This autumn the BFI is running a blockbuster season about love, kicking off over the August bank holiday with a 'Summer Love Weekend' at the British Museum, and programming films across three themes: 'The Power of Love', 'Fatal Attractions', of which at the Film Fund we still see plenty, and 'Fools for Love' – ie the romantic comedy - of which we see very few.

What's happened to the British romcom? It's 21 years since Four Weddings and a Funeral, made on a budget of just under £3 million, announced the marriage of Richard Curtis and Hugh Grant −a creative partnership still unrivalled in British film. It made Grant an instant international movie star, established the already successful Working Title as a powerhouse production company, and kicked off a decade-long romcom purple patch for the British film industry.

The six films Grant made with Working Title – 1993's Four Weddings, 1999's Notting Hill, 2001's Bridget Jones's Diary, 2002's About a Boy, 2003's Love Actually, 2004's Bridget Jones: The Edge of Reason -took more than \$1.5 billion at the box office.

Grant largely stopped making films in the UK after BJ2, pairing up with American writerdirector Marc Lawrence, with whom he's since made four American romcoms alongside Sandra Bullock, Drew Barrymore, Sarah Jessica Parker and Marisa Tomei, each looking to repeat the successful Four Weddings/Notting Hill formula of Hugh Grant + Hollywood actress = \$\$\$.

Romcoms are built around stars. Since Hugh Grant eloped, we haven't found another star with the same popular appeal



Success: Catastrophe

Romcoms rely on great writers like Curtis, but are built around stars. Since Grant eloped, we haven't found another star with the same popular appeal. Working Title actually found one, ironically, in Renée Zellweger, and tested both Paul Bettany (Wimbledon) and Domnhall Gleeson (About Time) as leading men, but they've had a fraction of Grant's effect at the box office.

Earlier this year, Simon Pegg starred alongside Lake Bell in Ben Palmer's Man Up-an attempt by UK production company Big Talk to kickstart the genre. But despite a very funny script by Tess Morris (who clearly knows and loves the genre), it fell over, with just £1.2 million at the UK box office. One of the criticisms was that Man Up tried too hard to repeat the successful Working Title formula, and as a result felt dated.

The poster child for British comedy is now the less romantic The Inbetweeners, and countless TV spin-offs now in development hope to find the same kind of success. So it is clear that the romcom is in need of reinvention.

In the US, this reinvention is happening, mostly thanks to women. Amy Schumer wrote and stars in Trainwreck, a subversion of the formula, about a woman taught by her father to believe that "monogamy isn't realistic". Paul Feig's comedies, meanwhile, allow for romance as a part of his characters' lives, but it's often a long way from the centre of their universe.

Further afield, China has seen a remarkable rise in the popularity of romantic comedies over the past few years among a growing audience of young professional women looking to redefine themselves culturally and socially.

We would be wise to shift the search away from leading men in the Hugh Grant mould, and focus a little more on finding stars like Schumer, Melissa McCarthy and Kristen Wiig. As part of the BFI NET.WORK, Creative England and Big Talk recently launched a scheme called Funny Girls, looking for new writing talent from women.

In the UK, the best romantic comedy is currently on TV. Sharon Horgan and Rob Delaney's Catastrophe is a long way from the Curtis/Grant model, but it is relatable, believable and modern, and they have chemistry. If they turned to feature films it could be gold. In the meantime, we'll keep desperately seeking (and developing) that next romantic comedy idea, which will rely on a combination of talent, timing and magic to get it right. 9

Ben Roberts is director of the **BFI Film Fund @bfiben**

IN PRODUCTION

- Debra Granik, who followed her feature Winter's Bone (2010) with the 2014 documentary Stray Dog, is to stay with documentary for her next film, which will look at the reintegration into society of former convicts after they have served their time in prison.
- Claire Denis is working with novelist Zadie Smith and Smith's writer husband Nick Laird on an English-language sci-fi film. The film, as yet untitled, is reportedly set beyond the solar system in a "future that seems like the present". Other collaborators on this exciting sounding project include the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson, astrophysicist Aurélien Barrau, and regular Denis-collaborator Stuart Staples, of the band Tindersticks.
- David Gordon Green, whose Manglehorn is reviewed on page 81, is reportedly to direct Stronger, a film about Jeff Bauman, who lost both legs in the Boston Marathon bombings.
- Hana Makhmalbaf is to direct her first film since 2009's Green Days. The 26-year-old Iranian director is at work on an intergenerational drama set in Italy, entitled Single Mother. The script was written by Makhmalbaf's father Mohsen, while her brother Maysam is producing.
- Giuseppe Tornatore, director of Cinema Paradiso among other films, is in preproduction on a documentary about Ennio Morricone entitled The Sight of Music.
- Oliver Hirschbiegel, director of Downfall and the recent 13 Minutes, about Georg Elser, who in 1939 attempted to assassinate Hitler, is to direct a film about the Battle of the Marne in World War I.
- Radu Mihaileanu, the Romanian director of The Concert, is shooting his first English-language feature in Romania. The History of Love, based on Nicole Krauss's bestseller, spans decades and stars Derek Jacobi and Gemma Arterton, Jacobi is an old Polish man living in New York who reflects on the great love story of his life. Miyazaki Hayao (below) clearly hasn't
- taken well to retirement: despite announcing a stop to filmmaking last year, the great Japanese animator is to make a ten-minute computer-generated film for exhibition exclusively at the Ghibli Museum. Boro the Caterpillar is expected to take three years to produce, and will be the first film Miyazaki has made using only CGI.











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'TECHNICOLOR IS LIKE GOD'



Deliriously lush: Rock Hudson and Jane Wyman in Douglas Sirk's All That Heaven Allows

The range of Bologna's annual tour of the archives, and the sheer beauty of some of the films shown, make it an unmissable treat

By James Bell

This year's Il Cinema Ritrovato festival, the annual feast of archive cinema which draws lovers of old movies to Bologna, was aptly described by its director Gian Luca Farinelli in the festival's catalogue as a "Cinephile's Heaven". It was the first held since the death in September 2014 of Farinelli's longtime co-director Peter von Bagh — the festival's "artistic heart and mind", in the words of programmer Olaf Möller. Respects were paid in a selection of von Bagh's own films, but the best tribute to his generous and tirelessly curious spirit was surely that the week-long programme of 427 titles was as unpredictable and as frankly besotted with cinema of all shapes, sizes, age and origin as it has ever been.

Succumbing to that spirit and taking off-piste detours through the programme is really the only way to approach the festival. Though each day boasts at least a handful of canonical masterpieces in new restorations, this isn't an event that elevates so-called big titles in the manner of

a Cannes. The joy of Bologna is instead in its eclecticism, in the way that each new screening can be a revelation, expanding understanding of the cinema through a range of different eras. Films in the programme always have at the very least a historical interest, revealing another stitch in the tapestry of the cinematic past, or providing a bridge to the previously obscure. A typical day this year might begin with episodes of Louis Feuillade's 1915 silent serial Les Vampires, continue with an uproarious Leo McCarey comedy, move to a propagandistic feature from 1930s Armenia, followed by a Bluebird Photoplay silent featuring a budding starlet, an early colour film from Japan... all crowned by an open-air screening of Buster Keaton shorts in Bologna's atmospheric Piazza Maggiore. It's undeniably gluttonous, but never repetitive.

Adorning this year's poster was Ingrid
Bergman, her luminous face radiating from walls
across town. There was an open-air screening
of *Casablanca* (1942), introduced by Isabella
Rossellini, and a restoration of her father Roberto's *Europe '51* (1952), but the focus was on Bergman's
lesser-seen, mostly Swedish, pre-Hollywood
work. Bergman's star quality was obvious from
the outset, magnetic even in a supporting role
in her first feature, the 1935 ensemble comedy *Munkbrogreven* (*The Count of Monk's Bridge*).

The film was often very funny, and Bergman demonstrated a facility for comedy that she got to show too rarely in her later career. More typical of the internal conflict Bergman could so powerfully project was En kvinnas ansikte(A Woman's Face, 1938), in which she brilliantly plays a criminal whose face was disfigured in a fire as a child, her external scarring embittering her soul until a kindly surgeon repairs her looks, so encouraging her to reform (the film was remade three years later in Hollywood by George Cukor, starring Joan Crawford). The selection shown also included 1939's Intermezzo, the film that alerted David O. Selznick to Bergman's talent, and which was likewise remade in Hollywood; and the sole film Bergman (who had a German mother) made in Germany, the highly bizarre Die vier Gesellen (The Four Companions). Though it was made in 1938, you'd be hard pushed to detect the deepening abyss of the times in this buoyant tale of four female graphic design graduates who, unable to find employment in a patriarchal industry, set up together in a commune-like living and office space.

If anything, *Die vier Gesellen* felt closer in spirit to a pair of poetic realist masterpieces made at roughly the same time by Julien Duvivier over the border in Popular Front France. *La Belle Equipe* (1936) and *La Fin du jour* (1939) were both

zeitgeisty hymns to the potential of collective endeavour. The nuanced and honestly observed La Fin du jour is set in a retirement home for old stage actors (Michel Simon and Louis Jouvet among them), while in La Belle Equipe a group of down-on-their-luck men led by Jean Gabin see their fortunes turn with a lottery win: they invest the money in building a restaurant, a collective dream eventually sundered by jealousies and tragedy. La Belle Equipe had circulated for years with a happy ending imposed by the producer after initial commercial failure, the original presumed lost; but the new restoration screened in Bologna – made possible after a nitrate dupe was discovered by film historian Lenny Borger in Rome – reinstated Duvivier's far more pessimistic conclusion. Hopefully Blu-ray releases and UK screenings of both films will follow.

A focus that cut across a number of the programmes at this year's festival was 'colour'. S&S contributor Alexander Jacoby co-organised a selection of pioneering 1950s Japanese colour films. While some of the prints betrayed their age (next year Jacoby hopes to have a better crop, in terms of print quality and canonical titles), and some were relatively familiar (Mizoguchi Kenji's period epic New Tales of the Taira Clan, Kinugasa Teinosuke's Gate of *Hell*), there were some enjoyable discoveries - among them Sugie Toshio's irrepressible mambo musical comedy fantasy (for want of a better description) So Young, So Bright (1955), in which a trio of American-culture loving teenagers, played by popular singer-actresses of the time, have colourful, Monkees-esque adventures interspersed with musical numbers. It was exuberant evidence of the moment when Western pop cultural influences were starting to take hold over Japanese youth.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of Technicolor. The festival celebrated by screening four new digital restorations of films originally printed using the process (Kiss Me Kate, On the Town, The Wizard of Oz and Charles Vidor's Cover Girl), as well as seven gorgeous vintage Technicolor prints provided by different archives. A highlight of the week was a screening of a 50s print of Douglas Sirk's All That Heaven Allows (1955), preceded by a fist-pumping introduction by Nicola Mazzanti of the Royal Belgian Film Archive, who roared "Technicolor is like God, it cannot be copied!" The digital restorations looked vibrant and beautifully sharp in their own way, but there was an unmistakeable thrill in seeing Sirk's melodrama on a print from its time, its colours still almost deliriously, unstably lush and vivid, and wondering who else might have seen the very same print down the years (Fassbinder perhaps?). There was much discussion about the merits of digital restoration and projection - as well there should be – but the programme was a reminder of the excitement of seeing such a unique vintage colour print projected - "like walking through the halls of the Uffizi" in the words of Gian Luca Farinelli. The other films screened on original Technicolor prints were Vertigo, Jacques Tourneur's western Great Day in the Morning, Anthony Mann's The Heroes of Telemark, Alexander Korda's *The Thief of Bagdad*, Jacques Demy's *Model*



Syndicate before turning: Raphaël Médina, Jean Gabin, Aimos and Charles Vanel in La Belle Equipe

Shop, Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey and – a real treat – a very rare screening of a 1997 dye transfer Technicolor print of Terrence Malick's *The Thin Red Line* in the open air of Piazza Maggiore, the film's inky blacks, grassy greens and turquoise seas looking especially beautiful.

A programme of films from the Soviet 'thaw' of the early 50s looked fascinating but, as subtitles weren't available, meant relying on simultaneous and enervating audio translation, unless you happened to speak Russian. A Leo McCarey retrospective ranged from his gloriously funny early two-reelers starring silent comic performers such as Charley Chase, Hal Davidson and Laurel and Hardy, through classic screwballs such as The Awful Truth, to sombre Catholic dramas such as The Bells of St. Mary's. Why is Charley Chase not more honoured than he is, in the UK at least? His gift for wonderfully timed physical comedy approaches the holy trinity of Keaton, Lloyd and Chaplin. And has there been a finer director of comic actors than McCarey, who, as the retrospective's programmers all agreed, had his own mannerisms mimicked by many of the actors

The excitement of seeing a unique vintage colour print projected is 'like walking through the halls of the Uffizi'



Irrepressible: So Young, So Bright

with whom he worked, not least Cary Grant?

A programme entitled 'Jazz Goes to the Movies' included a screening of a beautiful print of Bert Stern and Aram Avakian's *Jazz on a Summer's Day* (1959), a document of the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival, in which sometime fashion photographer Stern's camera is as dedicated to capturing (again in lush colour) wealthy Newport and the audience as to the likes of Thelonious Monk, Gerry Mulligan, Anita O'Day, Mahalia Jackson and Louis Armstrong on stage. The film now looks as vital as a document of the enviable, high 20th-century experience had by some in booming late 50s America as of the (mostly fantastic) music.

Other highlights included a screening of Norman Foster's taut and long thought lost 1950 *noir Woman on the Run*, boasting both Ann Sheridan and plenty of pre-*Vertigo* location shots on the streets of San Francisco; and a new restoration of E.A. Dupont's *Variety* (1925), which starred Emil Jannings as one — perhaps unlikely — third of a trapeze trio eventually pulled apart by infidelity and jealousy.

A personal discovery was Iranian director Sohrab Shahid Saless's affecting *A Simple Event* (1973), included in a small selection of Iranian New Wave titles. The film sees life through the eyes of a lonely, quiet young boy after his mother's death, keeping routines of school, fishing with his father and suchlike. In its empathy for childhood and the clear simplicity of its telling, it anticipates Abbas Kiarostami's *Where Is the Friend's House?* (1987).

In a different register, but a marker of what makes Il Cinema Ritrovato so distinctive, was a selection of films shot during World War I by the pioneer of Tunisian cinema Albert Samama Chikly. Much of the material presented hadn't been seen in a century; it included unforgettable shots of the moonscape battlefield of Verdun in 1917, as well as hauntingly poetic footage of what might well have been many of the soldiers who fought and died there, splashing and bathing nude together in the sea. Here was the seemingly irretrievable past rushing back to bump against the present – the joy of Il Cinema Ritrovato in a nutshell. §

JOHN WATERS

Since his cheerfully outrageous debut feature *Mondo Trasho* in 1969, the director has provided a beacon for the maladjusted and misunderstood — and been a *bête noire* for puritans. But while his upcoming retrospective at the BFI Southbank in London might seem to grant a veneer of later-life respectability to the pope of trash, don't imagine he's lost any of his mischievous ability to shock and offend. **Interview by Kim Morgan**

Kim Morgan: You've had your entire retrospective at New York's Lincoln Center. Now, at the British Film Institute...

John Waters: Yes. As they say, "every goddam one..."

KM: How does this feel, twice in a row?
JW: Well, my international respectability is staggering, isn't it? [Laughs] I'm incredibly flattered. Are you kidding? I wish my mom were alive. She was such an Anglophile; she would have been so excited about it. I have no irony, for the first time in my

KM: You have gone into postirony though, I think...

life to say I'm really thrilled about it.

JW: I hope so. I have it at the end of *Pecker*[1998] – they toast the end of irony. But I am an irony dealer, really. At the same time, irony is elitism. I don't think if you're starving, do you ever think something is so bad it's good? But then, that's a snobby thing to say too. Someone asked me, "You don't think people in poor countries have a sense of humour?" Yes, but it might not be the same if they're starving to death or if they're in a boat trying to get to America. I don't think too many people are cracking irony jokes when they're in the trunk of a car, coming across the border. It just seems to me there's a time for everything... But of course I know plenty of people who are poor with a sense of humour. Or, upper-lower-class. They never say that! They say lower-middle-class, upper-middle-class, they never say upper-lowerclass, and that is the people I'm most interested in.

KM: I know this question is asked of a lot of filmmakers, but it's interesting, especially when it comes to you, because you have so many interests and influences and innovations of your own, so, what did make you pick up a camera to shoot film?

JW: I'll tell you my influences. I was a puppeteer for children's birthday parties, and so [B-movie producer/director] William Castle was an

influence. I'd try to throw all of those gimmicks in there. Somehow I got my hand on the *Village Voice* and started reading Jonas Mekas's column and that opened up the world of underground movies that I knew nothing about. I read about Warhol and Paul Morrissey and Kenneth Anger and, more than anybody, the Kuchar brothers.

I used to run away to New York all the time, on the Greyhound bus, and make up lies that I was going to a fraternity weekend or something and then go see these movies. I wanted to be an underground filmmaker. But at the same time, during my teenage years, we went to the drivein almost every night, and in Baltimore they tested every kind of '-ploitation': 'hicksploitation', 'blaxploitation', 'goresploitation' – I mean amazing stuff. I also used to go to the Rex Theatre in Baltimore. They were fighting with the censor board all the time, and they had both nudist camp movies and Ingmar Bergman. They'd show Monica's Hot Summer [Summer with Monika, 1952] Then they would cut out most of the dialogue



Cecil B. Demented (2000)

and just leave the bare tits scenes in, so those movies I was seeing too. All of those exploitation movies and Bergman. I love Bergman. I still love Bergman. I still just think of Brink of Life [1957], my favourite Bergman: three pregnant women in a maternity ward. I used to go to this college nearby, Delta College, and they showed every Bergman movie. I'd steal books and watch Bergman. I used to take Divine on acid and make him go to Bergman movies. And he would get so mad. I always remember The Hour of the Wolf [1968], where she rips her face off and Divine was like, "That's it. I'm not lookin' at these movies ever again. I want to see movies about rich people."

KM: What's always been interesting to me about Divine. Many think drag queens just want to be pretty and Divine could look really pretty, but he embraced being scary...

JW: Divine didn't want to pass as a woman; he wanted to pass as a monster. Divine didn't want to be a woman at all – he hated it – putting all that shit on. He was sweating all the time. He hated those wigs. The first thing he did when he walked off the stage was rip that wig off because the sweat would be pouring down. He did go in drag, a few times in high school, always as Elizabeth Taylor – she was his idol. And, then... he put some scars on him when he went to drag balls, but in those days drag balls were scary. They were in the ghetto and pimps were there and the drag queens put razorblades in their mouth. But he never wanted to be a woman; he never walked around like that. He was the opposite of transgender in any way, really. In the end, he was playing men's roles. He wanted to play everything. He wanted to do both. He just wanted to work, really.

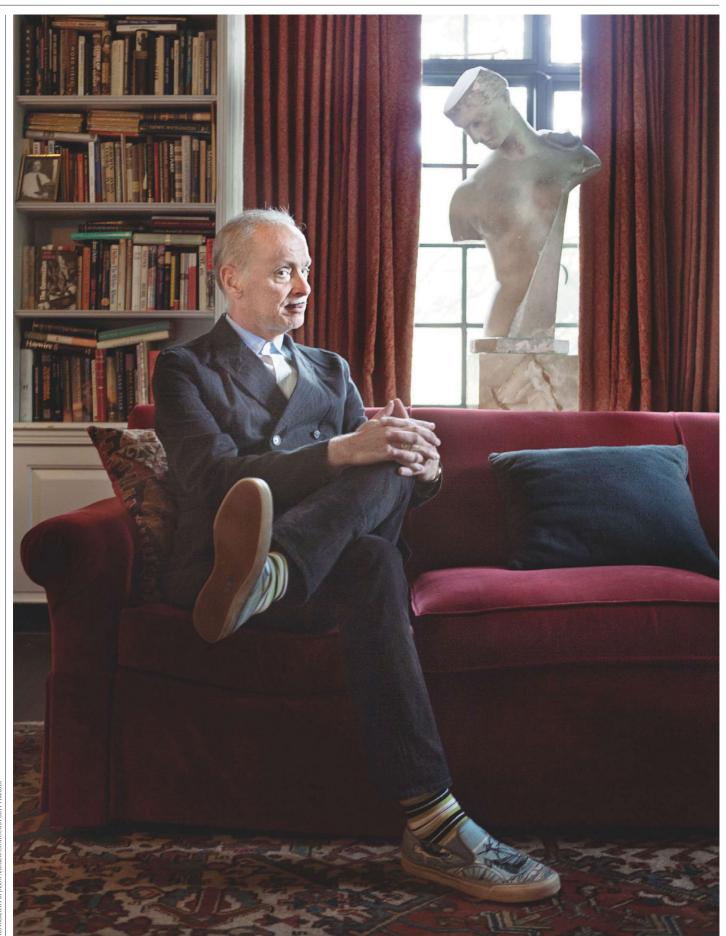
KM: And all of this, that melded into your aesthetic...

JW: Completely. I made exploitation movies for art theatres.

KM: And the look, the shooting...

JW: I didn't go to school. The only guys





who taught me anything, technically, were the teamsters who illegally stole the equipment from their TV stations and rented it to me on weekends without the station knowing about it, so they could get extra money. They really helped me. And they would keep horrible hours – like 25-hour days and stuff. And the guy at the film lab, Pete Gary, he was a very blue-collar kind of guy, he helped me. He just always made me sign papers so that I would take responsibility in case he was arrested for developing the movies, because I got busted one time and it was a lot of publicity. But these people who you would never imagine would know about me or like my movies, they're the people that taught me.

KM: But in terms of your aesthetic, you've mentioned underground movies, and exploitation and Bergman... but also the people around you, the way they dressed, just looking at the world, that contributes to an aesthetic.

JW: Oh, the aesthetic. I thought you meant technical. Oh, the aesthetic of those films and what you're saying, definitely. But the technical side, I'll quote *Cecil B. Demented* [2000]: "Technique is nothing but failed style." I had no idea what I was doing when I was making those movies. The first movie I made, Roman Candles [1966], I didn't know there was editing. I thought what came out of the camera was the movie and in this case, it was. So maybe that was Dogme 95 and I just didn't realise it.

KM: When thinking of Female Trouble [his 1974 film in which Divine's character is disfigured in an acid attack and taken to a local beauty salon where the owners find her new look inspired], I think of today, when so many people change their faces through extreme measures, and tabloid culture, how we follow celebrity crime... JW: Nobody's shot up liquid eyeliner yet.

KM: It's on its way! But, this idea in Female Trouble that crime and beauty are the same seems so relevant to me, especially now...

JW: That was all Genet. That was what I read in high school, he was a big influence on me. And I always say, "Everybody looks better under arrest." I still visit people in prison, I taught in prison. In my book Role Models [2010] I wrote a pretty serious thing about parole regarding one of the Manson women [Leslie Van Houten], who looks back in horror about it. So, I've always been interested in extreme behaviour. I would follow the Boston Bomber case mostly because I wanted to know what happened to the ex-wife of the one that died? She then remarried, supposedly, and has a child. I always say, "God. She has a boyfriend? Where did she find a new boyfriend? Where did she date?"

KM: Your movies often feel so ahead of their time, style-wise too. Just in terms of embracing retro culture, but not in this perfected way. More punk.

JW: In Pink Flamingos [1972] that blue and red hair that Mink Stole and David Lochary have was unheard of then. They had to bleach their hair out and put the colour in with magic marker or Indian ink. Today, you can go down to the Rite-Aid drug store and buy that colour. Pink Flamingos was punk before anybody really knew what punk was. I didn't know what it was either, but it was made to frighten hippies. But then,

the audience was hippies. And they wanted to be frightened. So it was a niche audience I was going for. But it wasn't just a gay audience at all, it was bikers, it was angry straight guys, crazy girls, it was just everybody who didn't fit in, in any minority, anywhere. The gay people didn't get along with other gay people; they thought they were too square. They were just... they were angry, and had a good sense of humour. And it's really healthy to be angry when you're young and very less so when you're old.

KM: Did you ever think you were influencing culture with these films as you were making them? I feel like Karl Lagerfeld could just walk into Female Trouble and it would make perfect sense.

JW: Yes. [Laughs] "Which designer did Cookie Mueller this year?" [The actress was Adam Selman's inspiration for this year's New York Fashion Week]. I'm always flattered by it. It's always great. Were we thinking of that when we did it? No.

I think Van Smith deserves a lot of the credit. He did the makeup and costumes for all of my films up to A Dirty Shame [2004], and when he died, he got amazing obituaries: Women's Wear Daily, the New York Times, the LA Times. His family was completely shocked; they didn't even know he had done all that. They didn't get it. And Van would have been shocked too because Van really never did go work with anybody else. We knew how to work with him, he was great, but he might have been a little hard on other movies – they might not have gotten his work methods. But the style, the look, it's all a lot because of Van.

In Multiple Maniacs [1970] I'd say, "Just shave his hair weird so there's more room for makeup. That's how that look started, the shaving of Divine's hair back. And, in one scene, his eyebrows go all the way around the back of his head. It is pretty extreme. But if you look back at what women looked like back then - look at Priscilla Presley when she got married. She didn't look that different from Divine in Female Trouble.

KM: It seems your audience is a great equaliser; it's always been all types, and still is.

JW: Yes. And they're all ages too. I was at this punk rock show, presenting at this show, and there was a punk rock group who were especially sleazy and hilarious and after they went off, I thought, "Boy I wish I had a teenage daughter. She could date one of these guys." I do bring out in people behaviour that you might not expect, but that's just humour. I don't think I'm ever mean, even Pink Flamingos, as shocking as it is. There are parts of it I look at now and think, "Oh my god... no wonder..." but I'm proud of it. It didn't mellow. It isn't old hat. It still works.

KM: And it would still shock [former head of the Maryland State Board of Censors] Mary Avara. I saw an interview with her from the 1990s; it was when Pecker came out and she was still mad at you.

JW: Well, the most she was mad was when we were making *Polyester*[1981] and *Multiple* Maniacs finally got shown in a real theatre, so she had to see it. When she saw the rosary job in that – it's when you put a rosary up someone's ass – she went so insane and banned the whole thing and went to court. The judge, he said his eyes had been insulted for 90 minutes but, still, it was not illegal. And she went insane from it. Because there was no law against rosary jobs. Because there is no such thing. [Laughs]

KM: Yes, I read a quote from her where she said, in her 80s: "I wanted to throw him out of the window."

JW: I know. She would go berserk. But I hated her with equal hatred... because she would make me cut a brand new print I had spent my last penny on. She would say things like, "Don't tell me about sex. I was married to an Italian." Now, I used that line in A Dirty Shame, so I got material from her. I've always said, dumb censors are your press agents. You should pay them. She really helped my career. But smart liberal censors, like the MPAA, they are the scary ones. You lose when you fight them.



Boom and bust: Selma Blair as 'Ursula Udders' in A Dirty Shame (2004)

KM: Yes. You got an NC-17 for A Dirty Shame JW: Yes. And what she [the MPAA censor] said was correct, "Oh, anyone over 17 can see it. That means anyone in college." Yes, but no theatre will play it, so it's a lemon. But the problem is, the same people have run that office for so long, they are unaccountable to anybody. They have more power than anybody. They need to get new people in there. And she's nice. That's the scary part. KM: In Multiple Maniacs, back to that rosary

job, which is funny, but shot so beautifully and artfully, cross cut with the crucifixion... And Divine says, "It's like fucking Jesus himself!" JW: [Laughs] I forgot that line...

KM: I thought of those crazy saints, like there's one I love. 14th-century Julian of Norwich, an anchoress, who wrote Revelations of Divine Love. The book is beautifully written, but it really sounds like she wants to have sex with Jesus page after page in her exaltations...

JW: All those crazy religious people are having sex with Jesus, aren't they? KM: Yes. You wrote about St Catherine of Siena in Role Models...

JW: Oh, I looove her. She's my favourite. She's the only one I pray to. And Pasolini. I pray to Pasolini...

KM: But did you think about those crazy religious people when you created that rosary scene in Multiple Maniacs? And filmmakers, like maybe Buñuel or Pasolini? There's a lot going on, and it reminded me so much of these holy women's relationships with Jesus...

JW: I did read those books. I read [Rudolph M. Bell's] Holy Anorexia. That is a great, great book. I read that later than Multiple Maniacs, but it's a book I've written and talked about: it's all the story of those saints and nuns. They were so out of their minds. They were like S&M, anorexic lunatics. And these people were prayed to. I love extreme Catholic behaviour before the Reformation. The Reformation ruined everything.

KM: You've discussed before about nuns and their movie censoring, how they were an influence on your cinema watching, movies they were declaring not to watch, like, say, Elia Kazan's Baby Doll [1956]...

JW: I went to private grade school and my mother was Catholic and my father wasn't, so when you didn't go to Catholic school, you had to go to Sunday school. But the nuns knew that these were the parents of the kids who didn't send their kids to Catholic school, so they hated your parents and they were very cruel to the children. My mother said, "When I was young, I loved the nuns." And I said, "Well something happened because these nuns were sadists." It made me rebel really early. All they did was tell you everything you'd go to hell for doing, constantly. We got the Catholic Review at home, and my mother told me it was the first she ever saw me rebel, when I was really young, when we had to stand up in church and take the Legion of Decency Pledge, which they did once a year. And I refused to do it. I would cut out the ads for [the condemned movies] and I would memorise them. Other kids memorise multiplication tables; I would remember And God Created... Woman [1956], Baby Doll. I would



remember them in alphabetical order. Of course, I would never have heard of these movies if not for the nuns. Naked in the Night [1958], Love Is My *Profession*[1958], that was my favourite, to hear the nuns say that one. My secret little life was that I pretended I had a dirty movie theatre; that's how I played as a child. All the movies that you go to hell for seeing. And I would redesign the ad campaigns... this was creative play to me. I always think later in life, all I really wanted as a child was the wrath of the pope himself. [Laughs]. KM: The term political correctness is overused, to the point where it starts to lose meaning, especially among liberals; it's

either a pejorative or not a pejorative. You've seen people rebelling on all sides of the spectrum, and when the term didn't exist... JW: I am politically correct. I am

completely politically correct.

KM: Yes. But there's got to be something beyond, perhaps? Like in your recent commencement speech at Rhode Island School of Design, you said, "Being gay is not enough anymore."

My secret life as a child was that I pretended I had a dirty movie theatre – all I really wanted was the wrath of the pope himself



Pink Flamingos (1972)

JW: It's not. In rich kid schools? Being straight... they're the ones who should be marching. As a gay man in the arts, do I ever feel prejudice? No. But, if I was gay maybe in a poor neighbourhood in a poor kids' school? Yes, then it can be a problem. It's a class issue now. What's happening now, with rich kids, they pretend they're gay when they're not. But then you have to do it. So, I don't care. I mean, "Eating pussy for politics." You still have to do it.

KM: When I was watching Multiple Maniacs, the scene where Divine is getting raped by Lobstora, it's hilarious. And then I thought, really, "Might some viewers be offended by this today?"

JW: Was it a rape joke? You're getting raped by a lobster? [Laughs] I think Gaspar Noé did a real scene with *Irreversible* [2002]; it's a brilliant movie about rape. But I think for comedy... yeah, it's a thin line. But I'm always looking for that thin line. I think that scene is funny. No one ever complained about that movie. The only movie anyone ever complained about was *Desperate Living*[1977] – in the beginning I was told, "How dare a man make a movie about lesbians?" But nowadays, it's really true that lesbian groups use that movie to raise money for colleges. And it's the same movie. And it kind of is offensive to lesbians [laughs], but they seem to like it.

KM: Where is Lobstora now? JW: I kept that lobster for a long





Divine intervention: Female Trouble (1974)

time before it fell apart. And I finally took it down to the harbour, when there used to be like rats down there. Now it's a fancy place. We put it in the water. We gave it a water burial. So that's where Lobstora lies: deep in the Chesapeake Bay. KM: Your actors take a lot of risks in your films, which seem like an initiation for some stars. Like, with Polyester, Tab Hunter was

really taking a chance then, in 1981. JW: Tab was taking a really big chance then. His career was really kind of nowhere at the point. and he figured, why not? Why not do it? And it did sort of revive him. The new documentary [Tab Hunter Confidential, 2015] is very good. And there's shots of him... Oh my god, you forget what he looked like when he was young. No wonder he was a movie star. He was amazing. It was really radical for Tab to do it, lying on the floor, kissing Divine. Nowadays, you can't even imagine that causing a ripple. But I remember we didn't announce it, until after I shot it. In those days, when Variety was great, we put that ad in with Tab and Divine embracing and people didn't believe it. They thought it was a parody. Tab was really brave to do it. It was probably the least money he ever got, and the most I had ever paid anyone. Two worlds meet.

KM: Johnny Depp is another star who changed his image, but very much on purpose, in Cry-Baby [1990].

JW: Yes, very much on purpose. He wanted to end the teen idol thing. And they've all done it. Traci Lords came to me because she escaped porn and she could play with me. Patty Hearst, same thing. Patty never signed an autograph in her life until she made a movie. Who wants to be a famous victim? She made fun of it by having fun. And then she could sign an autograph because she was doing something she was proud of. She didn't think being a kidnap victim was funny - I'm not saying that - but at the same time, she knew that the image was so strong that how can you get beyond that? How you get beyond it is to embrace it and to make fun of it, then they can't use it against it you.

KM: Kathleen Turner in Serial Mom [1993]...

JW: But she was already such a big star. I actually think it's my best movie. We had enough money, sort of. Kathleen was so good, everyone rose to her example. I think Mink's performance is great in it because she was surrounded by a different kind of acting. And I directed it differently. But then [in my earlier films] they had to memorise so much. Mink said in an interview that they were called amateurs, for their acting, but they were more professional than anybody. They had to remember ten pages of dialogue and do it in one continuous take, and if they got one word wrong, I'd cut and start all over from the beginning, so, I don't want to hear the word amateurish.

KM: Your movies tweak genres and conventions and even labels. What do you think of certain labels? Like camp? Or melodrama?

JW: Well, melodrama, I like. Camp, I've said a million times: "No one says that word any more do they?" Even kitsch. That's like old queens talking about Rita Hayworth. And there's nothing the matter with old queens talking about Rita Hayworth, I'd probably like to hear that. I haven't heard that in a while. But I don't even say trash any more. The punk movement never died... a lot of the punk world was gay. It was a great look for gay disguise. And it was a great look for really unattractive people. And goth. So I always loved that style, because if you were not a traditional beauty, or even if, by society's standards, you were ugly or had a body type that wasn't thought of as sexy, you could work it in the punk world and come across with a great look and be a star. So, I always felt comfortable in that world.

KM: It makes me think of how you view your characters and shoot them - like Edith Massey, an unusual, interesting-looking woman and, so, she photographs wonderfully. Who were the photographers who inspired you?

JW: Oh, Diane Arbus. The hugest influence on me, way before Pecker. If you look at that one shot ['A young Brooklyn family going for a Sunday outing', 1966], the woman who looks like Divine in Female Trouble, she's holding a child and the other child is drooling, we looked at that picture. That was a direct quote, basically. Diane Arbus was a huge, huge, huge influence. When I would sneak away and go to New York, I would sit in Washington Square, that's where the beatniks went, that's where the oddball gay people went and the drag queens, and that's where Arbus took all those pictures. As a kid, I thought, "Wow. This is dangerous here. This is beyond Life magazine." But I was corrupted by *Life* magazine too, because they brought Jackson Pollock, homosexuality, beatniks, all things into my house that I was so relieved to know about.

KM: Tennessee Williams was also an influence... JW: Oh, he saved me. Because when I first read him, I realised there was bohemia.

I was corrupted by 'Life' magazine because they brought me Pollock, homosexuality, beatniks – things I was so relieved to know about

Nobody had ever told me what that was and that's what I always wanted, and still want. That was the world I was trying to find.

KM: And Williams didn't define himself as one thing. One thing that might become problematic is when things are labelled too easily...

JW: I agree. I'm against separatism. That's what I said in my commencement speech. Separatism is defeat.

KM: That's why Hairspray [1988] works so well: you're really embracing acceptance with joy and humour. It's not to knock over someone's head with, it just is. And it's such a strong message in the movie.

JW: That's how you always get change, and change people's minds – by making them laugh. Not preaching. I always said that *Hairspray* was a Trojan Horse. It snuck in all my ideas, and still no one noticed, to this day. It's playing everywhere in America. Every high school is doing Hairspray. It's kind of amazing that happened. But the message of Hairspray is exactly the same as the message of *Pink Flamingos*. They are different in terms of material, in terms of what would be NC-17 and PG, but the message is the same. Maybe teen dance shows were the one thing I was obsessed with that didn't scare people. But that was maybe just an accident.

KM: You've always used music brilliantly, and introducing older music, with great taste and some shocking surprises. Like, in A Dirty Shame, you had Slim Harpo's 'Baby Scratch My Back', but then Johnny Burnette's 'Eager Beaver Baby' and Doug Clark and the Hot Nuts's 'Baby Let Me Bang Your Box' and more... And in Mondo Trasho [1969] you've got that whole collage of music. You use music, not just as a soundtrack, but you overlap and songs run into each other to create this unique effect. And this before a lot of filmmakers were doing that. You had The Chordettes, The Del-Vikings, Little Richard, Link Wray...

JW: And that's why *Mondo Trasho* will never be released. It just makes the movie more and



The killer inside me: Kathleen Turner in Serial Mom (1993)



Polyester (1981)

more likely never to come out hundreds from years from now. I didn't know then that you were supposed to buy music rights. But it was a silent movie. You know how silent movies had music to tell the story? That's what I was going for. The first person to really do it was Kenneth Anger with Scorpio Rising [1964] – he was the first one to use pop music in that brilliant way. And [with Mondo Trasho] it's all because of the novelty hit 'Flying Saucer'. That was the first song that took lyrics, sampled them and told a story. A flying saucer has landed. And we cut to John Cameron Swayze... [singing] "Come on baby, let's go downtown." Meanwhile, the space ship is over here... It told a story by sampling lyrics from songs. That is where that came from.

KM: I love the scene where Divine is shoplifting to lke and Tina's 'Finger Poppin'.

JW: Oh, well, Ike and Tina. We were listening to them when we were shoplifting. Divine and I used to go a place and see them in high school.

KM: Oh my god. That must have been fantastic. JW: Oh my god, yes. The Ike and Tina Turner Revue. I don't care what anyone says, she was better when she was with him. I mean, I don't blame her for leaving him, good for her, but... We would see them at Unity Hall, it was a kind of working-class, blue-collar Union Hall. And they would come in a broken-down green school bus with 'Ike and Tina Turner Revue' painted on the side, like, hand-painted. And she looked like she did on the cover of 'Dynamite': she had on a ratty wig, a mink coat, a moustache, springalators, she did have a moustache. She was un-believe-ably great. And when they would sing, they would almost do rap songs, 'Letter to Ikey' and that. And the Ikettes behind them were so great. It was a huge influence on both Divine and I, Tina Turner. And I still love her. God knows, they could sing. They were unbelievable together. I saw them a couple times. And they'd sing 'Don't Play Me Cheap'. Oh my god... she was an influence. More than anybody. I had an album A Date with John Waters and I have that song, 'All I Can Do Is Cry', that long one where Ike's getting married to somebody else. I wish I could have done that video with her. They didn't have videos then but imagine that video with her. "I took a seat at the back of the church." Ohhhh...

KM: You've said before that you didn't like television, or you didn't watch it. Has that opinion changed through the years?

JW: Television today is better than it has ever been. But I still don't watch it much. I watched *The Wire* every episode and loved it. And, I'm in the middle of maybe doing a TV project.



Cry-Baby (1990)

But I love to read; that's how I like to relax. I read a couple books a week. So, I can't watch television. I can't do both. But I know I'm missing something really great. It's certainly better than independent movies these days.

KM: With independent movies, in America,

KM: With independent movies, in America, you've talked about how your kind of indie is on the out and how it's so hard to get properly financed for a movie now. And people often ask, "When is your next movie?"

JW: If there is one, it'll probably be on TV. Because more people see it, you get better budgets. I don't get why kids want to go to a mall and stadium seating when *Spartacus* or *Ben Hur* aren't playing... KM: Classics.

JW: You know, I met Douglas Sirk with Fassbinder. Talk about the odd couple. They made a movie! I saw it. A short, written by Tennessee Williams. [The film is likely 1979's Bourbon Street Blues, co-directed by Sirk and starring Fassbinder.] It was in German so I couldn't understand it. Sirk directed and Fassbinder is in it. This was at the Berlin Film Festival, they showed it to me.

KM: You watch so many movies, what do you mostly go for?

JW: It seems more and more I go for the European ones – they're the movies that I really like the best. I write the 'ten best' list in *Artforum* every year and it seems like they're always European ones. But I've always liked those movies. They're lucky. In those countries, the government gives them money to make those movies. Can you imagine the government giving Bruno Dumont money to make a movie in America? [*Laughs*] We're the only country where basically the government tries to make you stop making movies.

KM: The British films you programmed for the BFI season, they're interesting partly because they're not typical or canonical: no Carol Reed, no Powell and Pressburger...

JW: The Deep Blue Sea [2011] is a movie I really love. Trog [1970] only because Joan Crawford, when she made it, she was such a pro. She really took this seriously — as she did every movie she made because she was an insane movie star. A real movie star, the kind we barely have anymore. So no matter what the material, she had done horror before, she'd done a lot of them, but this one [laughs], this one, maybe she should have said no... The Derek Jarman movie Blue [1993] because I think it's such a radical, beautiful movie. And, it's not like people are clamouring to see it.

KM: I was very pleased to see Joseph Losey's *Boom!* [1968] on the list.

JW: Boom!, yes. I've presented it for many years. It's an amazing movie. It's staggering when



Pecker (1998)

you watch it, it's so great and then so awful. So that means it's perfect, really. And Tennessee Williams did say... that it was the best movie ever made from his work and I think maybe I, and Tennessee, are the only people who agree with it.

KM: The lines in that movie. Insane, but things you might say: "Shit on your mother!"

JW: The dialogue is so staggering. To me, the best is when, Richard Burton, every time a wave crashes, he says "Boom!" – "The shock of each moment of still being alive." I live in Provincetown most of the summer and whenever I see a wave hit a rock, I say that to myself. And they were all drunk when they made it. And you can tell. Elizabeth Taylor tried to buy the house, and they kept telling her, "It's a set. There's no roof." I always said – and in Cecil B. Demented the cultists have a tattoo of their favourite film director – but if I had to get a tattoo, it would say 'Joseph Losey'. [Laughs]

KM: You said that Serial Mom was your best film... do you have a favourite?

JW: It's hard to say. With my movies... you know, I don't pick 'em! I'm always amazed that one did better than the other. Serial Mom is certainly the most professional. If I had to sit with an audience and watch one of my movies, which is always, ugh... god, god [laughs], if it were up to me, they'd be ten minutes long, I would probably pick that one. I'm a fan of Cecil B. Demented lately.

KM: Cecil B. Demented might be a good idea, for real, now. Kidnap a movie star to get your movie funded.

JW: Right. [*Laughs*]. That was kind of Lars von Trier-ish. He might do that.

KM: In terms of your Dreamlander actors, was everyone game all of the time? You had some actors do some pretty extreme stuff...

JW: Yes. Everyone was game. Recently I presented the [William Friedkin] film Killer Joe... that scene with the chicken. And Mink [Stole] said afterwards, "They were just like us. They went for it. If you're gonna do it, go for it." And she was right. It was never anyone saying, "Should we do this?" It was just like group madness. We all were on the same page; all doing it as a group effort and it was almost like a political act in a weird way. It was exciting. We were young and everyone was bonded together. We were... what's that psychosocial term when you're crazy all together?

KM: Amour fou?

JW: Yes. That's what we were. And proud to be so.



'It Isn't Very Pretty... The Complete Films of John Waters (Every Goddam One of Them)' is at BFI Southbank, London, from 1 September – 6 October

TOTAL TRASH

Shot largely without technical skill and featuring performers without conventional talent, America's taboo-busting trash classics offer a gleeful celebration of everything that might appal a mainstream audience **By Tim Lucas**

"Just because people don't like it and they have no use for it doesn't mean it's garbage!" Holly Woodlawn in Paul Morrissey's 'Trash' (1970)

What is 'trash cinema'? Ask a dozen people and you'll get a dozen answers, but here's my take on the subject.

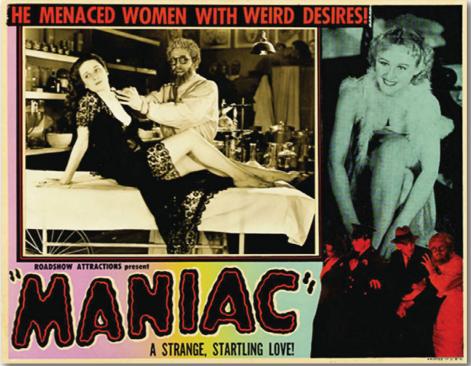
To be truly worthy of the adjective, trash movies should live up (or rather, down) to their adjective by embodying the very refuse of mainstream cinema. To wit, they should concern themselves with only those areas of human experience that mainstream cinema denies us. It should sink its teeth into only the most unwelcome, gooey, taboo subjects, and it should envelop us in a dank, homely feeling, as simultaneously comforting and acridly repelling as a freshly wet bed. It should be photographed without skill, preferably on short ends. It should cross the line more often than a professional scab. Its ineptitude should make murder hilarious, eroticism repugnant, ugliness appealing; it should feature dialogue so abysmal that it has a perfection equal to a Cole Porter lyric.

Likewise, such films should star actors unlikely to be found anywhere else, least of all in respectable movies – people like Boris Lugosi, Thomas Sweetwood and Uta Erickson. John Waters knows this: he has extended this 'untouchables' tradition by casting his own flamboyantly trashy films with the publicly and/or professionally notorious (eg, Patty Hearst, Traci Lords). That said, Waters's later films are less authentically trashy than in 'trash drag' – for the simple reason that, by appearing in his movies, some of his outcasts and discoveries succeeded in building or resurrecting their careers.

A trash director may do what he – and it is nearly always a he – does in order to pay the rent, because he's a sociopath and otherwise unemployable, or because it's the only way he could ever lay hands on Pat Barrington, June Roberts or Uschi Digart. Nine times out of ten, the presence of real technical skill, for me, disqualifies from consideration certain filmmakers who may be crossing your mind – people like Roger Corman, Russ Meyer, Sam Fuller, even Jesús Franco (see page 104). Those guys are, or were, mavericks. There is also a difference between being



n's film, released in 1962, plays on the mad scientist caricature, in suitably bad taste



Edge of madness: Dwain Esper's 1934 film might be the first to assemble all the essentials of trash

interested in the sordid – as David Lynch or Paul Bartel have been – and being sordid.

John Ford films teach us how to walk upright, Gene Kelly films teach us how to dance, but sometimes the spirit wants to remember what it means to crawl, to grovel, to blow off everything that the best of cinema and common courtesy have inculcated in us, to make ourselves available to the very worst in ourselves. Misogyny, for example, is a common element of the trashiest cinema, which may explain why this category didn't attract many women directors. Sometimes, in order to better appreciate the Sistine Chapel ceiling, we need to revisit the gutter – and trash cinema, with its boundless propensities for excess, may help us to laugh at what we find there. Unlike po-faced exploitation cinema, trash cinema never loses its sense of humour about how far beyond the pale it goes. It's unrelenting grunge with a twinkle.

Much like some philosophers have claimed there was no Devil till after the first Church had been built, trash cinema seems to have been brought into being by the introduction of the Motion Picture Production Code in 1930. While it is not exclusive to America, America does seem to be its most natural habitat. Reflecting the audience appetite for, and commercial potential of, salacious material, in the 1950s and 60s America imported respectable films from Europe and gave them trash appeal by retitling them Monika, The Story of a Bad Girl!, Spoiled Rotten and The Naked and the Wicked. Antecedents of trash cinema would include American paperback culture and the phenomenon



Shanty Tramp (1967)

of the carnival sideshow. Writer-director Tod Browning, whose Louisville, Kentucky childhood inculcated in him a taste for the sensational and forbidden, was the earliest major studio director to explore a fascination with tabloid subjects in studio films. His career-immolating *Freaks* (1932) was briefly released by MGM before being sold off to Dwain Esper, whose exploitation fare titillated under the cover of educating the general public (*Reefer Madness, How to Undress in Front of Your Husband*).

So what, you may ask, are the most essential titles?

In assembling a list, why not begin with Dwain Esper, whose **Maniac** (1934) is perhaps the earliest film to assemble all the essentials of trash? The story, written with a very short attention span, concerns a vaudevillian, moonlighting as an assistant for a mad scientist, who murders and inters his associate in order to stage his "greatest impersonation". Produced for a chain of

downmarket theatres run by carnival showman Louis Sonney, *Maniac* shows the influence of sideshow spectacle and also the *Spicy* pulp magazines, which first appeared that same year – encompassing scenes of female nudity and rape, as well as a faked but still distressing scene of a cat's eye being plucked from its socket and eaten. "Why, not unlike an oyster or a grape," we're told. Recklessly photographed by William C. Thompson, who would preside over Edward D. Wood, Jr's trash in the 1950s.

Speaking of Wood, his Glen or Glenda (1953) is more competently made than most trash, but everything about it feels discarded. It's about transvestism, one of the most marginalised subjects of its day, and its only star is Bela Lugosi, an actor whose post-Dracula career can be viewed as a gruelling lesson in humility. In a touch that would become somewhat common to trash cinema, the writer-director himself poses as his own leading man ('Daniel Davis') to give a remarkably confessional performance. How can Glen tell his fiancée that what he really loves is her angora sweater? Leavened with scratchy, second-hand stock footage ("Would you be surprised to know that this rough, tough individual is wearing pink satin undies under his rough exterior clothing? He is."), some prints include an extended dream sequence of Irving Klaw-like bondage vignettes, making it even trashier.

A similar sleaziness permeates Joseph Green's **The Brain That Wouldn't Die** (1962), about a scientist (Jason Evers) who preserves the head of his decapitated fiancée (Virginia Leith, the star of Kubrick's 1952 debut feature *Fear and Desire*) and sniffs around strip joints for a body more suitable to his desires. Filmed in 1959 in a manner so salacious and grisly as to gratify both the sex and horror markets, it wasn't released until 1962 – but it has become a WTF classic, and is a memorable topic of conversation between Jack Nicholson and Meryl Streep in Mike Nichols's Nora Ephron-scripted *Heartburn* (1986).

In the early to mid 1960s, K. Gordon Murray became famous as the presenter of imported fairytale features – Rumpelstiltskin (1955), Santa Claus (1959) and Little Red Riding *Hood*(1960) − a bargain basement Walt Disney. As the decade wound down, he added Mexican horror films such as The Brainiac (1961) to his roster, but the biggest surprise of his producing career was **Shanty Tramp** (1967). Bible belt drive-ins had been receptive to southern sizzlers since the days of Elia Kazan's *Baby Doll* (1956) and Russ Meyer's Lorna (1964), but Shanty Tramp – about a town trollop who excites uncontrollable desire in, variously, a motorcycle gang leader, a black teenager destined for lynching, a Bible-thumping evangelist and



Clothes make the man: Dolores Fuller and Ed Wood in Glen or Glenda (1953)



Ginger snaps: Don Schain's 1971 film was made so cheaply it couldn't help but make money

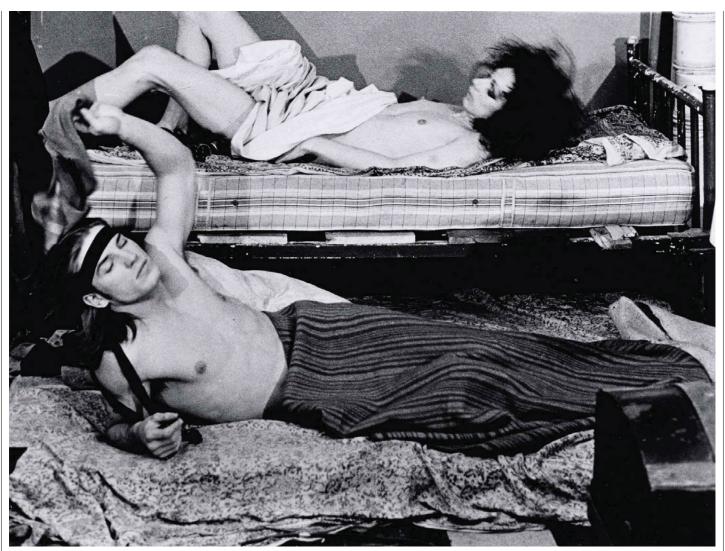


In 'A Thousand Pleasures', our hero finds himself the centrepiece of an orgiastic party increasingly unsure of whether he wants to escape or succumb her own drunken father – was the ultimate throw-down to any drive-in fodder suggesting the distant paternity of Tennessee Williams. Directed by trashmeister Joseph P. Mawra, who gave the world the Olga S&M serials (White Slaves of Chinatown, Olga's Girls, Olga's House of Shame), the film starred 'Lee Holland' – who ends the tale by murdering the drunken father who would have assaulted her, rising bare-breasted and bloody. It was later discovered that 'Lee Holland' was moonlighting Florida schoolteacher Eleanor Vaill. We can only imagine the riot that would have ensued had her students caught her big screen debut.

As trash specialists go, Michael Findlay who directed many of his trash films as 'Julian Marsh' and starred in them as 'Robert West' or 'Robert Wester' – had a certain artistic consciousness. His Take Me Naked (1966) quotes the poetry of Pierre Louÿs; the third film of his notorious 'Flesh' trilogy (1968's The Kiss of Her Flesh) references Dr Mabuse. The rooms his characters inhabit - likely his own - are often handsomely furnished with books. For all this, his filmography is an extended, helplessly fascinating wallow in exhibitionism and misogynistic depravity. A prime example is **A Thousand Pleasures** (1968), in which Findlay – credited, as a wink to those few then paying attention, as 'Robert Wuesterwurst' plays a henpecked husband who, while out disposing of the corpse of his wife, is abducted by two deranged lesbian adventuresses. Taken to a secluded house in the woods, where the women keep another grown woman (named Baby) infantilised in a crib, our hero finds himself the centrepiece of an orgiastic party – increasingly unsure of whether he wants to escape or succumb.

The nature of trash cinema gave it a gravitational pull for gay filmmakers who delighted in its potential for flamboyant camp and, alternately, direct confrontation. The nadir of both was Andy Milligan, a New York-based director and playwright whose 1965 featurette Vapors was the first explicitly gay film released in America. Milligan tried his clumsy hand at art films - his unfinished *Compass Rose* (1967) is the only surviving visual record of New York's Caffe Cino scene (the birthplace of 'Off-Off-Broadway') – and almost none of his 1960s 'adults only' work survives. In 1968, he tried his hand at lurid horror with The Ghastly Ones and never turned back. Joe Dante, reviewing for the New York trade magazine Film Bulletin, memorably wrote that it looked "like a home movie from Bedlam and gives evidence of having been processed in a dirty bathtub". Shooting with a single noisy 16mm Auricon camera, spun chaotically at the end of each shot, Milligan racked up an





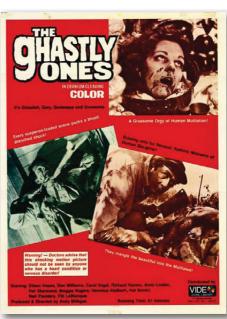
Bedtime stories: Paul Morrissey's breakthrough commercial film Trash (1970) gives the category its name

amazing list of films about the loathsome and the self-loathing. His work might best be described as weird and woozy amalgams of Tod Slaughter, *Dark Shadows* and Jean Genet.

Much as Milligan's talent was nurtured by Joe Cino, who ran Caffe Cino, Paul Morrissey's talent enjoyed the sponsorship of Andy Warhol, whose gallery connections gave the pair's two-screen-experience Chelsea Girls (1966) overnight notoriety. Morrissey's fascination with personalitydriven cinema derived generous fuel from the various characters ('superstars') who frequented Warhol's Factory. His breakthrough commercial film Trash (1970), which gives this category its name, shares with the other films in this survey a taste for high drama, a sense of the outrageous, and meandering camerawork that drifts in and out of focus. Trash documents the domestic trials and miseries of a garbage-picking common-law couple, Joe (Joe Dallesandro) and Holly (drag queen Holly Woodlawn) - Joe's an impotent junkie burglar and Holly has a plan to adopt her pregnant

sister's unwanted child so they can "get back on welfare and become respectable". The relentless scheming, screaming and squalor occasionally stumbles from perverse hilarity into moments of temporary beauty, as when a domestic argument over Joe's lack of sexual response culminates in Holly getting herself off with a Miller High Life bottle, as he nods out on the floor—climaxing in a loving afterglow not unlike a Renaissance painting in its composition.

At the beginning of the 1970s, former theatre manager Don Schain conceived the character of Ginger McAllister, a well-heeled, long-legged, political science major and former cheerleader (nice *curriculum vitae* for a woman in her early 30s!) whose readiness for action of all sorts made her the ideal recruit for, ahem, undercover work. Schain cast his wife Cheri Caffaro to star, and **Ginger** (1971) was the result. Working opposite leading men recruited from the gay porn pool (including *Boys in the Sand*'s Casey Donovan), the film drools over Ginger's Oldsmobile like it's an Aston



Andy Milligan's lurid 1968 horror The Ghastly Ones

Martin and presents a series of New Jersey dives like they're the choicest night spots on the Cap d'Antibes. It also arranges several opportunities for the naked Ginger to be tied up, licked and manhandled at length — as happened to Caffaro in literally every film Schain made with her, prior to their divorce. Made so cheaply it couldn't help but make money, this seedy abysm of action trash led to *The Abductors* (1972) and *Girls Are for Loving* (1973).

If we accept that America is the motherland of trash cinema, its capital may well reside in the state of Florida. It was there that two of the category's biggest names — Herschell Gordon Lewis and Doris Wishman — got their start in the 'nudie-cutie' industry, the former working as 'Lewis H. Gordon', the latter as 'Louis Silverman.' In 1963, tired of filming around swimming pools and volleyball courts, Lewis innovated the colour 'gore' film with *Blood Feast*, the story of an Egyptian caterer aspiring

to resurrect the goddess Ishtar, who is finally ground up in the back of a trash collection truck "like the human garbage he was".

A decade later, Lewis climaxed a profitable run of increasingly bloodthirsty films with The Gore Gore Girls (1972) – in many ways, the most appalling film in this survey. There's a serial killer on the loose; the victims are all female, slutty and obnoxious. Predictably, Lewis subjects these women to all manner of loathsome torments, from plucked eyeballs to cannibalised flesh, presenting each new horrifying encounter with the kind of relish in violence normally reserved for a Tom and Jerry cartoon. But when we meet the film's investigating detective Abraham Gentry, played by the unforgettable Frank Kress, the film trumps its own misogyny with misanthropy. Gentry is utterly hateful, the kind of preening, condescending, contemptuous, contemptible detective that could only be conceived by a mind that

looks at Sherlock Holmes and proclaims him a "faggot" for his refined eccentricities. *The Gore Gore Girls* is at once this subgenre's incendiary climax and its most toxic satire.

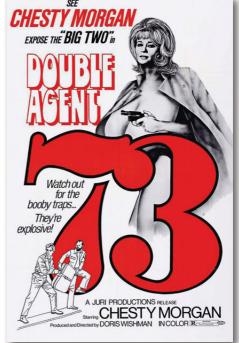
Doris Wishman, a native New Yorker, started directing in Florida but – after five years of helming 'fun in the sun' frolics returned to New York, where she made a series of black-and-white potboilers. The first of these was the distinctly trashy Bad Girls Go to Hell (1965), in which Gigi Darlene is attacked while taking out the rubbish, kills the perpetrator in self-defence, then flees inevitable punishment into the clutches of still-worse abuse. *Indecent Desires* (1968) is another story pivoting on garbage and trash as a psychopath discovers a doll in a dustbin and notices its resemblance to Babs, an unsuspecting neighbourhood woman whom he then abducts. Even trashier than Wishman's subject matter was her visual technique, in which no woman



Out of the frying pan: Gigi Darlene in Doris Wishman's Bad Girls Go to Hell (1965)



Smother love: Wishman's Deadly Weapons (1974), starring Chesty Morgan



Wishman's spy drama Double Agent 73 (1973)

Even trashier than Wishman's subjects was her technique, in which no woman could cross a room without the camera dropping to show off her shoes

could cross a room without the camera dropping to show off her shoes - it would be decades before the cinema produced another foot fetishist equal to Wishman. In the early 1970s, Wishman (then in her 60s) relocated to Florida, where her work became more outrageously exploitative. *The Amazing Transplant* (1970) chronicled the consequences when the penis of a serial rapist was grafted to the body of a normal man, but she scored her biggest successes with **Double Agent 73** (1973) and **Deadly** Weapons (1972). These turgid spy pictures starred the overly ample charms of Chesty Morgan (73-32-36), who used her mammoth breasts either to smother the murderers of her beloved, or to take (somehow) surreptitious photos with a photographic implant. There were a few other female directors who specialised in exploitation films in the 1960s (Stephanie Rothman), 1970s (Roberta Findlay) and 1980s (Barbara Peeters), but Wishman was arguably the only female avatar of trash cinema - as I have defined it – until Canadian sisters Jen and Sylvia Soska made their debut with the credit-cardfunded Dead Hooker in a Trunk in 2009.

Florida was also the home of Brad F. Grinter, whose greatest claim to our incredulity is **Blood Freak** (1972). Narrated by a greasily suave, chain-smoking Grinter, it's the tragic story of a Vietnam vet who eats some tainted meat while high on pot and turns into a preposterously turkey-headed vampire. The hilarious 'gobble-gobbles' on the soundtrack prior to his attacks are at odds with the grim violence, and when Grinter's closing narration becomes overrun with uncontrollable coughing, we realise that he intended a serious film about addiction, God help him.

In some ways, the aforementioned films were disconnected and without genus until John Waters arrived with his 1972 midnight movie Pink Flamingos, the film that somehow unified the loose detritus of trash into some kind of proud, willfully perverse aesthetic. While not really new – you can see a similar aesthetic at work on The Addams Family and Paul Morrissey's films, and there's a similar premise to be found in Michael Findlay's The Ultimate Degenerate (1969) – the sheer extremity of Pink Flamingos was new and strangely defining. Here the boomerangbrowed Divine - called 'The Filthiest Person Alive' in the press – is challenged for this title by drug-dealing kidnappers Connie Marble (Mink Stole) and Raymond Marble (David Lochary). But the real message of the film – expressed as various cast members indulge in shoplifting, lunchmeat-fondling, chicken fucking, cock wagging and triumphal shit-eating – is that everyone is obscene in their own way. *Ich bin ein* Divine. 9





Brad F. Grinter's Blood Freak (1972)



John Waters's Pink Flamingos (1972)

THE ROAD **TO EXCESS**

Britain never had a truly alternative trash cinema culture like America's, but its cheap populist films still captured the genre's naive energy, dubious tastes and frank eroticism

By I.Q. Hunter

Trash and British cinema make uneasy bedfellows. Our national cinema's reputation is for classic war films, literary adaptations, romantic comedies and subsidised social realism; in short, for exportable respectability. But from the quota quickies of the 30s (low-budget movies commissioned by US producers to satisfy the demand for British films following the instigation of a quota system in UK cinemas) to 50s B movies and more than 400 independently made horror and sexploitation films, British cinema has had a long tradition of low-budget populism, critically disregarded and frequently offensive to guardians of morality and public taste.

Until recently only a handful of cultists celebrated beasts in the British cellar like the Mary Millington sex film Come Play with Me (1977), which played for two years in London's Soho, or On the Buses, made by Hammer, supposedly in its decline, which was the top-grossing British film of 1971. To their detractors - almost everyone - such films remain an embarrassment. Yet their unpretentiousness, frank eroticism and brisk action catch the essential trashiness of cinema itself: its non-literary quality; its derivation from melodrama, the pulps and comic books; and its aptness for delivering cheap but potent thrills. The naive energy of trash exploitation can win over the most hardened cinephile. In fact, some of the greatest British films were once dismissed as trash, most notoriously Michael Powell's Peeping Tom (1960), which was reviled on its initial release by London critics. Changed critical priorities have comprehensively revised the canon of British cinema and reassessed not only films that critics and distributors dismissed as trash (Hammer titles, Performance in 1970, The Wicker Manin 1973), but also, more cautiously, the tastes and preferences of ordinary audiences resistant to high-minded notions of cinema's purpose.

The roll call of essential British trash begins with David MacDonald's Devil Girl from Mars (1954), in which an alien woman in fetish gear and a robot companion resembling a fridge land near an isolated Scottish pub bent on kidnapping men to repopulate her planet. This scenario was



Queen of Scots: David MacDonald's Devil Girl from Mars (1954)

given a thinly disguised arthouse makeover in *Under the Skin* (2013), which is rather less fun than the unassuming original. The golden age of British trash, however, was the 60s and early 70s, before the withdrawal of US funding and the end of the Eady Levy (which had raised tax revenues from box-office receipts to support British film). This was an era when British exploitation threw up sublime and incomprehensible novelties, such as the SF musical Gonks Go Beat (1965), Hammer's Slave Girls (1966) and Toomorrow (1970), in which the youthful energy of Oliver Newton-John's pop group reinvigorates the virility of an alien race.

British exploitation, unlike its US equivalent, was never a truly alternative cinema. The films were vetted by the BBFC and generally shown in the major chains, and its auteurs were rarely crazy subversives like French fantastique director Jean Rollin, but

'Psychomania' seems a very British kind of trash. For all the transgression, there is a sense of compromise and restraint



Psychomania (1972)

rather journeymen haphazardly taking on new projects in search of a quick buck. Take, for example, a high point of British trash: the zombie biker film Psychomania (1972), directed by Don Sharp, in which a remarkably middle class biker gang called the Living Dead commit suicide, come back to life, and go berserk around the shops of Shepperton High Street. Its deadpan trashiness offers a succession of wonderfully photogenic moments – such as Beryl Reid turning into a frog – that defy conventional categories of good and bad filmmaking. This is, of course, one of the chief reasons that exploitation films are appropriated as cult movies: they can come across as essentially unauthored exercises in surrealism. Yet Psychomania also seems a very British kind of trash. For all the expected excess and transgression, there is a sense of compromise, awkward restraint, poverty and embarrassment at respected actors, such as Reid and George Sanders as her butler, slumming it in roles beneath their considerable dignity.

Such films are not, however, trash in the John Waters sense. Trash has come to mean something more than just bad films



Slave Girls (1966)

or financially embarrassed fly-by-night productions. These days it chiefly means films that deliberately appeal to a cultish sensibility and which embrace the deviant style and content of exploitation as an escape from the straight-jacket of classical realism and middle class taste. That is certainly how Waters's early camp-infused films worked, emerging from the countercultural underground to terrorise hip bourgeois audiences with grossout celebrations of trash lifestyles. As Andrew Sarris once said, the highbrow will always prefer the low brow over the middle brow.

The figure closest to Waters in British cinema, and its leading impresario of trash, was the filmmaker, distributor and programmer Antony Balch. From the early 60s to the mid-70s, Balch, 'the Abominable Showman', straddled the intellectual/exploitation divide with unique aplomb. As well as collaborating with the beat writer William Burroughs on experimental films such as Towers Open Fire (1963) and The Cut-Ups (1966), he distributed foreign sexploitation and art films under newly devised titles (according to rumour he planned to release Bresson's 1966 film Au hasard Balthazar as The Beast *Is Not for Beating*). As programmer for the Jacey cinema in Piccadilly, he advertised X-rated films with outrageous ad mats and posters. His advert for Secret Paris (1964) in Continental Film Review touted "unbelievable scenes", such as "navel worshippers" and "the girl with the removable behind".

Balch was a gay entrepreneur who had an eye for the commercial in exploitation and art films alike, while retaining a droll sense of absurdity. At a time when the distinction between arthouse and exploitation was increasingly moot, his programmes were provocative collisions of art and trash designed as much to bewilder as to entertain his cinemas' clientele. In 1968 he played a recut version he'd made of the 1922 silent film Häxan: Witchcraft Through the Ages, with a languorous commentary by Burroughs, in a triple bill with Buñuel's Un chien andalou (1928) and a sex film, Young Aphrodites (1963).



Horror Hospital (1973)



Message movie: Antony Balch's Secrets of Sex (1969) works as an avant-garde parody of sexploitation

Antony Balch's films boasted a distinctive camp sensibility seemingly designed to provoke straight audiences

The exploitation films he directed, *Secrets* of Sex (1969) and Horror Hospital (1973), boasted a distinctive camp sensibility that played havoc with generic tropes in a way seemingly designed to provoke straight audiences. Secrets of Sex, an all but avant-garde parody of sexploitation documentaries, was a curiously anti-sex diatribe about the normalcy of 'perversion'. A portmanteau message movie about the war of the sexes, its episodes include a man who falls in love with a pangolin and a male model castrated by a female photographer by suspending him over the blade of a 'Spanish horse', a type of medieval torture device. Resolutely queer in foregrounding handsome young men lounging about half-naked with copies of Genet and Burroughs, Secrets of Sex manages slyly to sabotage the sex film while normalising the 'deviance' of homosexuality. Balch ran it at the Jacey in a triple bill with a sex film and a Bugs Bunny cartoon.

His masterpiece, however, was *Horror Hospital*, in which a mad scientist (Michael Gough), aided by a dwarf and a team of leather-clad bikers out of *Scorpio Rising* (1964), lobotomises young people to create a private army of zombies. A seeming allegory of the Establishment hysterically trying to control permissive sexuality, it would make a perfect double bill with *Psychomania*. Balch had a genuine trash aesthetic, embracing the low for its transgressiveness as well as its commercial possibilities. Before his early death in 1980, he tried to get backing

for two films that typified his insouciance towards cultural boundaries: a sexually explicit musical adaptation of Burroughs's *Naked Lunch* (Mick Jagger and Dennis Hopper were variously approached to star) and a project titled 'The Sex Life of Adolf Hitler', which sounds like a lost Russ Meyer film.

In the 70s Balch's style of knowingly camp trash briefly flourished in glam Britain. The two Dr. Phibes movies, *Theatre of Blood* (1973) and above all *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* (1975), with its celebration of hedonistic perversity, all took it into the mainstream of horror. Derek Jarman's *Jubilee* (1977) appropriated trash for arthouse punk, while Ken Russell contributed a series of wildly imaginative art-trash crossovers, such as *Lisztomania* (1975) and the completely barking *Lair of the White Worm* (1988).

As for British trash today, the adventurous cinephile should check out ready-made cult films on cable and DVD such as Evil Aliens (2004), Strippers vs Werewolves (2012), Cockneys vs Zombies (2012) and Kill Keith (2011), with Keith Chegwin as a 'cereal killer'. Far from subversive in the Waters/Balch mode, these films are intentional trash – like *Sharknado* (2013) – for audiences tutored in and attuned to their low-grade rote transgressions. The most interesting examples of trash in the UK in the 2000s have been low comedies such as Sex Lives of the Potato Men (2003) and the energetic revenge dramas Outlaw (2006) and *Straightheads* (2006), featuring the king of recent British trash, Danny Dyer. Staunch exercises in liberal-baiting aimed at that least fashionable of audiences, working class lads, these grubby little films, as offensive to most critics as *Peeping Tom* was in the 1960s, conjure bleak tabloidinspired visions of contemporary Britain as itself irredeemably trashed and trashy. 9





FIRST LOVE, LAST RITES

In '45 Years', Andrew Haigh's superb followup to 'Weekend', the ghosts of the past come back to haunt a long-married couple after the body of the husband's former girlfriend is discovered in a melting glacier, where she has lain since an accident half a century earlier

By Nick James

Long-term relationships are rarely a sellable subject in movies but that's just one of the elements that make Andrew Haigh's 45 Years unique. The title refers to a looming wedding anniversary for elderly Norfolk dwellers Kate (Charlotte Rampling) and Geoff (Tom Courtenay) — a retired trade unionist — whose plans to celebrate their 40th were disrupted by Geoff's need for a heart bypass operation, the scar from which serves as a symbol for what transpires. Prior knowledge of the film won't ruin too much of its subtle unpicking of the nuances and compromises that come from a near lifelong commitment, but I should warn that it will take the edge off some early surprises.

One morning Geoff receives an official letter from Swiss authorities informing him that a melting glacier has exposed the preserved body of his former German girlfriend, who had fallen to her death in an accident half a century before. This unsought news sends Geoff into a kind of secret nostalgic grief for what might have been, which Kate soon picks up on and becomes increasingly alarmed by.

Haigh, as we shall see, chose this project at the very moment when his surprise hit debut *Weekend*, a touchingly realistic study of two gay men getting to know each other romantically, had made him the toast of the indie world. It is being released just as Haigh's subsequent US gay dating TV series *Looking* has come to a hiatus, with only a round-up finale left to be shot. Our pleasingly expansive interview took place in London's Soho in June.

Nick James: Let's start with when you'd had your big success with Weekend and then chose to do something as different as 45 Years. What other things were you offered?

Andrew Haigh: A selection of mediocre romantic comedies which I was never interested in. I would say no to everything until my agents said, "Okay, we'll send no more." I'd made a short film, Five Miles Out, with

Film4, which was based on a short story and the publisher of that sent me a David Constantine collection. And that's when I read the 45 Years short story, which is called *In Another Country*, and instantly I thought, "This is something I'd like to make." 45 Years and Weekend are not dissimilar: they're both about people trying to understand what their lives should be. Relationships are what define us, whether we like it or not.

NJ: 45 Years takes you personally more out of your own experience – the sexuality is different – yet the two films are like bookends.

AH: Weekend is obviously about a gay relationship as it's about two guys. I am gay so I'm not that interested in my own gayness. It was more about their relationship. But then it comes out and everybody's like, "Oh, it's about being gay." 45 Years gave me a chance to explore similar ideas about relationships within a different context, so I could expand on things I was thinking about without it being overshadowed by their sexuality.

NJ: Was there a particular quality about Constantine's writing that appealed to you?

AH: There was a sparseness and a simplicity to it. It seems a very simple story, yet it manages to be really profound. It's mainly told from the male perspective, and there's no wedding anniversary party; the ages are actually older—they're in their late eighties. That was a big decision, to lower the ages. Actually the short story's set in the mid-1990s, around the time of the end of Conservative rule, and when it flashes back it's to the Second World War. I shifted that because I wanted the memories of this past relationship to be more of a 1960s, vibrant youth type of thing and also to set it in the present day.

NJ: Did you add the trade union element?

AH: Yes. Part of what Geoff is harking back to is not just this beautiful woman from the past but the possibilities of youth, of what you think your future will become, politically and socially. His being a part of the trade union movement and then that disintegrating in his head as he got older, just having that anger, made sense.

NJ: You've shifted the emphasis from him to her. A lot of gay male directors seek the woman's view in a heterosexual relationship. Did you feel that way?

AH: A lot of films and novels are about the male laterage existential crisis. I like those stories but there isn't



CRISIS MANAGEMENT Director Andrew Haigh (right) switched the focus of the short story on which 45 Years was based from the male character's viewpoint to that of Charlotte Rampling's Kate (below), as she tries to make sense of her feelings for her husband really a later-age female existential crisis book or movie. So why not? It's not as if women don't have doubts and fears and concerns about whether they've made the right choices. It just made sense to me. François Ozon does lots of strong female characters, and when you're gay you do perhaps favour the underdog in a relationship. What fascinated me is that Geoff has this crisis in the first half and then gets over it, and then Kate strongly pushes it down until she has her own crisis. When I was writing it, I asked myself, "Are people going to be frustrated with her for not standing up to him more?" But her acting irrationally makes sense. That she was just like, "I'm not going to deal with that, I'm going to pretend that doesn't exist," made sense. She's very secure in her choices and in the understanding of what her life has become. So for it to be pushed sideways a bit is disconcerting. A lot of the film is her trying to move it back on to the path and then at the final moment she finds out she can't.

NJ: I was worrying that the purity of the kind of love the audience might be expecting her to want may be impossible.

AH: When you're young and you first start a relationship, you don't really understand — it's like, "Okay, I'm feeling this great overpowering emotion." Very quickly that goes and the love you have for your partner is similar to the love you have for your family or your dog [laughs]. It's like a deep love... if [somebody] says, "Do you love that person?", you're like, "Yeah." But you can't really articulate why you love them because your life has just become this normal thing. Geoff's not looking back at his life and thinking, "Oh my God, I wish I'd had that vital love"—and Kate knows that. It's more about what would have happened to Kate if that woman had not died. He would've married her. They would've had kids, and Kate's life would've been unbelievably different.

NJ: In terms of getting things about older people right, who, apart from the actors, did you consult?

AH: I didn't really consult anyone. What frustrated me about other British depictions of old age is they never felt like actual real people, they felt like caricatures. People in their sixties and seventies are still thinking about themselves and the world around them. I wrote it as I would feel now—I'm 42. I've been in a relationship for ten years. How do I remember the beginnings of my relationship? So it was about not trying to write for older people. Obviously, when the actors come on board, you ask, "Does this feel truthful?" You only have to talk to Tom or Charlotte and it's not like they're two old fuddy-duddies who sit around drinking tea all day.

NJ: But they're not now super-athletic people. Was there a management of frailty?

AH: We certainly had more time. We did five-day weeks, they were relatively easy days, and there was a lot of talk as well, especially in the first half, and we shot in order pretty much. It's a different pace. Weekend was very quick and on Looking we have five days to shoot a half-hour episode. You realise that older actors talk slower. Young people speak really quickly. Scenes that you think will be over quicker take longer and I don't cut that much, so scenes would be a lot longer than I thought.

NJ: What's your general approach to the visual?

AH: Weekend is mostly handheld, but this is more locked down – though there is a similarity in that I do want to let things breathe and allow things to happen in front of my face rather than have it created through the edit. So a

lot of scenes are just one shot, and I'm a big fan of the two-shot – people seem to not like them very much, but I just want to see my two characters interact with each other. And I like to see emotional changes happen on screen, not within the edit. This is why I don't think film is like television, which is constantly cutting for emotional effect. In a dialogue scene, you're going to be cutting backwards and forwards to create an emotional effect, to create transitions within the scene.

NJ: Also in film you're not telling us what's happening, whereas with TV the dialogue often explains the action taking place on screen.

AH: Exactly. At the moment I want to explore more objective viewpoints but still have a very focused point of view. Weekend is the same in that you never see Glen unless Russell's there, so it's like focusing the point of view, but still taking a step back, allowing you to see but not be told. It was the same for 45 Years. We shot the film in order, and lighting for me always has to be naturalistic -light outside the window and not inside the room, that sort of thing. I don't do coverage [using a number of cameras to shoot a scene to offer a greater choice during the editing process]. There's more cutting in 45 Years but still the coverage is very minimal. That visual approach really does help. It's good for actors, because they know the performance is actually going to get seen. It's also more high risk, so they know they have to get it right. I don't even really rehearse on set - maybe one very brief blocking rehearsal, but that's it. But it also creates an unusual tone when you shoot like that because it doesn't feel like traditionally what film or TV feels like. The acting feels slightly different, because usually it's cut together.

NJ: Can you talk about the landscape in your film?

AH: There isn't actually a huge amount of landscapes in there. Usually when you shoot somewhere like Norfolk, there is. When you live somewhere for years, the landscape is no longer important. I lived in Norwich for three years. When you first get there the landscape is amazing, but within two weeks it's flat and boring and you see just an endless horizon, which is quite terrifying. So I didn't want to overdo landscape.

NJ: But then you have those nice punctuation shots when she's riding the boats on the Broads.

AH: That was wanting to create some kind of space because there had been a lot of talking, and after that moment it all kind of shuts down between the two of them. I used to go on those boats and there's something very isolating and strange about that kind of landscape. There's a bit in Jean-Paul Sartre's *Nausea* when he's sitting underneath a tree and everything collapses around him in terms of thought. For me the boat trip was almost like this moment of realisation that her life was disintegrating around her. It's a very difficult thing to depict on screen, but that moment in the film is when what she knows of her existence is drifting away.

NJ: Their dog is a child substitute, yes?

AH: I did think about it a little bit as a child substitute. I also like the fact that it's an Alsatian, and he might've chosen it, so it's got German heritage. It's far too subtle, but I like to get those little things in there.

NJ: What camera was it?

AH: We shot on film, 35mm. I figured this might be the last chance I'd ever get to shoot on film. *Weekend* was on the [Canon] 5D. But it's strange because I shot *45 Years*



You shoot digitally and you have these amazing monitors. You go back to shooting film and you've got this shitty little monitor and you can't see anything

in between the two seasons of *Looking*, and obviously you shoot digitally there and you have these amazing monitors on set and you're like, "Wow, I can see everything." You go back to shooting film and you've got this shitty little monitor and you can't see anything. I use a lot of long lenses, so I can't even be near the actors. I can't see their faces, so it's quite a challenge. Me and [DP] Lol [Crawley] talked a lot about it. We wanted the image to have a timelessness, but also a softness to it. I didn't want the actors to wear huge amounts of makeup. We wanted the lighting to be very naturalistic and sometimes have no lighting at all. Video is really difficult to make look good when you're not lighting it.

NJ: Why do you shoot in sequence?

AH: I've always done it with films. It opens you up to more surprises and if you're trying to be subtle, you'll shoot a scene and something subtly can happen in that scene that really does affect the next scene in the story. Out of order, that doesn't work. And also it enables the actors to have that scene in their memory when they shoot the next.

NJ: Are there any stories from the set?

AH: When you start a film it always takes a good few days to get into it. The crew are working together, everyone is finding their roles. And at the end, everybody is exhausted. So I would love to shoot in order and then go back and shoot a few other things, because it takes a really long time to get into the rhythm. And sometimes the ending of film sets are strange, everyone's got a few

days to go, they usually have gotten really drunk, and this is the most important part of the film. So I don't go out when I'm filming. I go to bed. Of course, crews like to have fun. So that's sometimes the problem of shooting in order. Also it's a nightmare for producers. My brain is very linear. Often people say, "Let's just do flashbacks." People send me scripts and the minute I see a flashback, I just can't. My brain doesn't work like that.

NJ: Did you look at any other films specifically for this one? AH: Not specifically. You have to find references to show people in order for them to give you money. I always use *Uzak*, the Nuri Bilge Ceylan film, because I love it so much. And I used *Tuesday, After Christmas*, the Radu Muntean film. It's about the breakup of a relationship. And then you throw a few references, like, "It's going to be a bit like Cassavetes!" And they're like, "Oh, great, we like it!" But I don't watch too many films in preparation.

NJ: You didn't look at other stuff your actors had done?

AH: I rewatched *Under the Sand* [with Rampling] and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* [with Courtenay], but if you're going to work with an actor, I don't like to watch too many of their films because you have no idea how that performance was created. Once I've watched other people's performances too much, I lose belief in the performance I'm trying to create. But I feel like my influences change dramatically. Lately I've been on a Sidney Lumet binge. I've watched a few Louis Malles as well and there's a similar simplicity in their visual style, but also Lumet's blocking is amazing.

NJ: Tell me about working with Charlotte Rampling.

AH: I was terrified when I first met her in Paris. She has a studio, and I remember going up in the lift and thinking, "Oh my God." I mean, she's Charlotte Rampling. You think she's going to be terrifying and she's incredibly sweet. She has absolutely no interest in small talk. She wants to talk about things properly. She's very open and very considerate. And she's just really intelligent and wants only to do work that really interests her. I admire her for the choices she's made. I'm not an overly hands-on director when it comes to performances. I like to create an environment. Directing is more about the creation of the project rather than when you're actually shooting. The best way to direct is talking outside the actual shooting. So I like being in the changing room and having a cup of tea and a chat. It's those conversations that you



I suspected 'Looking' would be cancelled. The viewership was small. It's never going to be for mainstream audiences unless you make it mainstream

SEX AND THE CITY
Haigh's Weekend (below)
follows a gay couple
meeting and falling in love in
Manchester, while his HBO
television series Looking
(above) follows the dating
lives of a group of gay
friends in San Francisco

have that create the mood you're trying to achieve. And obviously you guide when things aren't working. I would never say to an actor, "Can you do this line with more... whatever?" I wouldn't know how to do that.

NJ: How about Tom Courtenay?

AH: He was the same. There's something daunting about working with people who have worked with big directors. But Tom was so accommodating and he was pleased that he had a script that he could actually put himself into properly. For slightly older actors it's usually like, "Oh, you're the funny uncle who comes in and does a few funny things and then you're gone." So they were both totally committed to it. And what I like about Tom: he is a sensitive man. You can imagine certain actors doing that role just being angry the whole time and I didn't want that to be the case for Geoff. I wanted you to still care about him. He still loves his wife, he doesn't want to hurt her. He gets lost in thoughts of the past and memories.

NJ: With Looking now cancelled, what's next?

AH: I am doing a wrap-up movie for the show and I shoot in October. It's just giving it a little ending.

NJ: How bad was it hearing that news?

AH: I suspected it was going to happen. The viewership was small. It's very hard to make something gay-themed. It's never going to be for mainstream audiences unless you make it mainstream. So it's tough. HBO shows are expensive. Also, I didn't want to do the show for seven years. When you're starting to build your career, it's very tempting to do something else.

NJ: What was it like taking on the showrunner role on Looking?

AH: It's a weird job because everyone says film and TV are now the same. But anyone who thinks that is fooling themselves. Being a showrunner and having a writer's room is not like writing a feature; the edit process is not like the one on a movie; and even down to sound design, you cannot do the same things on a TV show you do on a movie. They have rules about how loud things can be. I like TV, but it is limiting sometimes. Film is where I want to keep working and that's quite hard, because you keep getting sent scripts and they say, "We know it's not that good, but it would be really good for your career." §



45 Years is released in UK cinemas on 28 August and is reviewed on page 75



CLASSIC FILMS



Under The Volcano

Geoffrey Firmin (Albert Finney), British Consul to Mexico, has quit his job after divorcing Yvonne (Jacqueline Bisset), and takes solace with a bottle of booze. Double Oscar nominated film including Best Actor for Albert Finney.

Release Date - 20th July 2015

Available on Blu-ray

Dr Terror's House of Horrors

Restored by Pinewood Post Production with newly commissioned Steelbook art by Graham Humphreys and a specially commissioned hour long documentary by horror film director Jake West, this collector's edition is strictly limited to 4,000 individually numbered Steel Books. Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing star in this British horror classic from Amicus Productions.

Release Date - 26th October 2015
Available on Blu-ray Steelbook



Without doubt, the greatest reggae film of alltime, directed by the great Perry Henzell. Jimmy Cliff plays a young, Kingston musician whose attempt to lift himself out of poverty leads to meddling with drug-dealing and murder.

Release Date - 24th August 2015 Available on Blu-ray & DVD



A British horror classic of the 1970s starring Robin Askwith, Michael Gough and Dennis Price, who all welcome you to check in to Brittlehouse Manor, a 'health resort' where young people are cured of all their hang-ups in one stroke of Doctor Storm's scalpel.

Release Date - 10th August 2015 Available on Blu-ray & DVD

Asylum

One of the most incredible fly-on-the-wall documentaries ever made in which a film crew lives with the schizophrenic residents of a retreat based upon radical psychiatrist R. D. Laing's controversial approach to healing through compassion and freedom.

Release Date - 10th August 2015

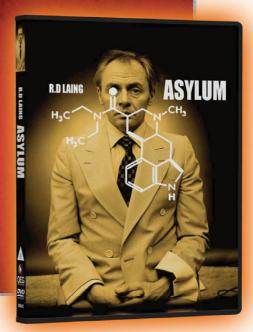
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and all good retailers











OUT OF THIS WORLD

The late Russian director Aleksei German's apocalyptic vision of life on a distant planet, 'Hard to Be a God', took him almost 50 years to bring to fruition and represents the logical culmination of a brilliant, wayward career

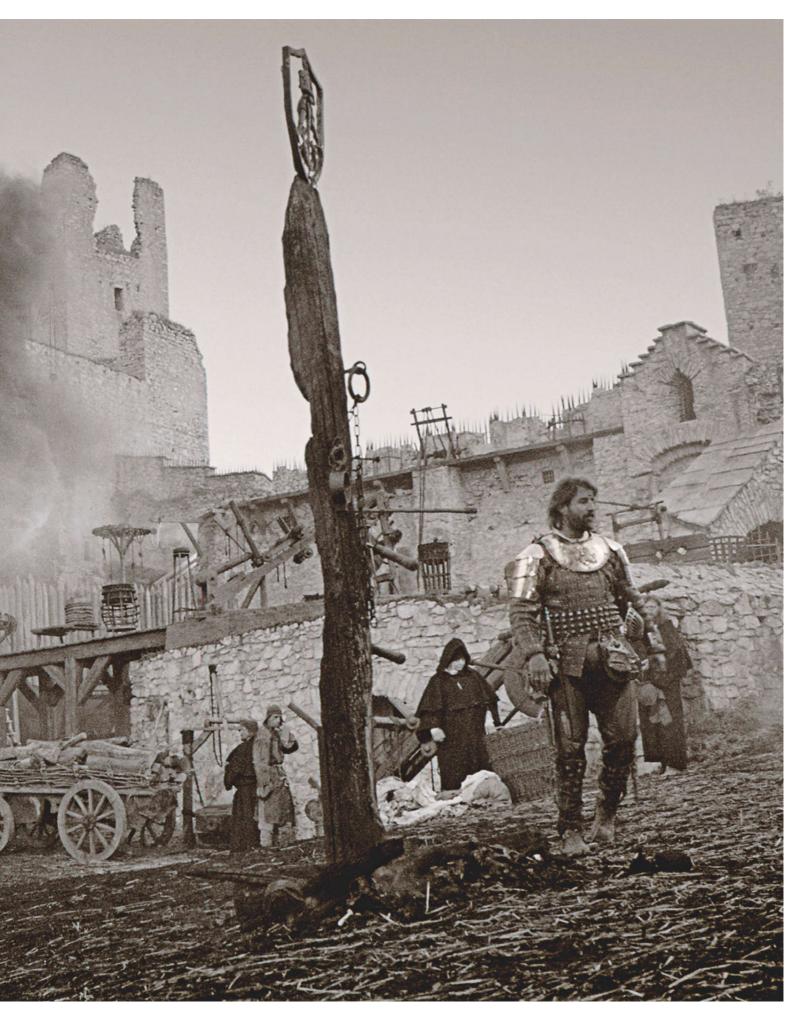
By Michael Brooke

If ever a single film constituted a whole life's work, it must be *Hard to Be a God.* Aleksei German had wanted to adapt Arkady and Boris Strugatsky's eponymous 1964 novel ever since he first read it shortly after publication, but for decades the project's many logistical challenges proved insurmountable. Shooting finally began in 2000, finished in 2006, and an equivalently lengthy period of post-production was interrupted by German's death on 21 February 2013. Fortunately, the film was almost complete, bar the final sound mix, and German's son, Aleksei Jr, supervised the final stages with the help of his mother, co-screenwriter Svetlana Karmalita. It finally premiered at the Rome Film Festival in November 2013 and, after a 2014 festival tour (including London), it's getting a limited theatrical, Blu-ray and DVD release this summer.

Although ostensibly science fiction, Hard to Be a God is, like Andrei Tarkovsky's own Strugatsky adaptation Stalker, set in a familiar-looking universe, in this case the planet Arkanar, said to be 800 years behind our own in terms of civilisational development. Essentially, we're mired (few words are more appropriate given the quantities of rain and mud on display) in a pre-Enlightenment medieval world, and whether there's likely to be a Renaissance of any kind remains an open question, given the ruthless suppression of anyone displaying even the merest hint of independent thought. In the subtitles prepared by Mark Bence and Daniel Bird for the UK release, the term 'smartarse' recurs frequently and invariably pejoratively, usually in the context of a report about yet another one being interned or killed. Don Rumata (Leonid Yarmolnik) is our guide through this morass, a scientist sent from Earth who has convinced the Arkanar locals there that he's descended from one of their gods - which doesn't always mean that they leave him alone, but he does get treated with a modicum of respect, a commodity otherwise in vanishingly short supply.

LIVING IN THE PAST
Although it is ostensibly
science fiction, Hard to Be
a God (right) looks like a
vision of our own medieval
world, in which every surface
is dripping rainwater, mud
and bodily fluids





However, Rumata is working under a strict code of practice that forbids him from intervening in the development of Arkanar's culture and technology, no matter how frustrating he finds the spectacle of its inhabitants relentlessly pushing themselves further back into the dark ages. (The viewer is welcome to divine any number of allegorical parallels: current events in Syria and Iraq offer plenty.)

That synopsis is more coherent than the film itself proves to be, as German's approach is immersive rather than explicatory. As Orson Welles first demonstrated seven decades ago, you don't need 3D glasses to create a convincingly three-dimensional world: just a combination of deep-focus cinematography and mise en scène cramming the frame with simultaneous action on multiple planes. A favourite technique here is to have something dangling in the extreme foreground, or to have someone (usually an unnamed extra who is never seen again) walk past the camera and glance at it as though acknowledging the presence of unseen visitors. Vladimir Ilyin and Yury Klimenko's pin-sharp black-andwhite cinematography is relentlessly tactile, with every surface dripping with rainwater, mud and bodily fluids ranging from gobbets of saliva to gouts of blood. Rumata often attracts people's attention by grabbing them by the nose, as if to temporarily shut off what must otherwise be an overwhelming and relentless stench. It's one of the most singular visions seen in cinema for many, many years: comparisons with Bosch, Bruegel, Rabelais and Tarkovsky are all too apt, but it's also the entirely logical upshot of German's own wayward career.

Aleksei Yurievich German was born in 1938 into an already distinguished creative family: his father Yuri German was a popular writer, especially during World War II, although his son later attributed part of his success to a certain naivety, or at least a willingness not to delve too deeply into troubling events. Of course, Yuri was part of a different generation and any compromises he may have made have to be seen in that light – but this theme clearly made a deep enough impression on Aleksei for him to treat it from various angles across all six films that he directed, either singly or in collaboration. 'Hard to Be a God' is one of the most singular visions seen in cinema for many, many years: comparisons with Bosch, Bruegel and Rabelais are all too apt

VISIONS OF DARKNESS Aleksei German on the set of Hard to Be a God (below left): and his first solo film. the WWII drama Trial on the Road (1971), which has echoes of Malick and Tarkovsky

The typical German protagonist is a highly intelligent man who can clearly see what is wrong with the situations that he's witnessing firsthand, but who cannot express his objections directly without running into official trouble (which, given that all his films before *Hard to Be a God* are set during the 'red terror' or Stalin's regime, means a death sentence). So they remain outsiders, not quite traditional Russian yurodivy, or holy fools, but men whose individuality is often perceived as eccentricity by the people around them, even if we can see that their behaviour is entirely rational.

Take General Adamov, the protagonist of German's first feature The Seventh Companion (Sedmoy Sputnik, 1967). A former Tsarist officer at a time of revolutionary upheaval and civil war, his abiding belief in the rule of law underpins everything he says and does. Tellingly, when threatened with "consequences" by one of his captors, he ruefully quips, "I understand the consequences; it's the causes that baffle me." He survives thanks to being equally aware of the flaws underpinning the old regime and broadly sympathetic to the ideals (if by no means the practice) of Bolshevism, but the many conversations that he has along the way serve only to reinforce his essential apartness from both Reds and Whites. German later disowned this film, partly because his considerably more conservative co-director Grigori Aronov vetoed most of his younger colleague's more radical suggestions (such as casting a comedian as Adamov instead of the renowned stage actor Andrei Popov) – but for all its comparative cinematic unadventurousness the film reveals enough of German's personality in embryonic form to make it worth seeking out.

However, it's clear from the opening scene of his first solo feature Trial on the Road (1971) why German felt hamstrung on the earlier project. Set during WWII, it begins with Wehrmacht soldiers brutalising Soviet villagers, but German is just as exercised by the effect of this upheaval on the surrounding flora and fauna as he is on the hapless humans. There cannot possibly have been any influence in either direction, but the sequence in which cattle are rounded up to the incongruously gentle strains of a solo balalaika and a quizzically detached female





narrator has a distinctly Terrence Malickian flavour. The resemblance to Tarkovsky's early work is less likely to be a coincidence, thanks to the presence of actors Anatoly Solonitsyn, Rolan Bykov and Nikolai Burlyayev: Andrei Rublev (1966) in particular, in which all three actors appeared, is recalled by the widescreen black-and-white cinematography, the close attention paid to texture and sound (especially the crunch of snow underfoot during a Russian winter) and the various ethical debates conducted between Red Army officials who don't know what to do with their newly captured prisoner Lazarev (Vladimir Zamanskiy). Like Adamov, Lazarev is torn between two sides: in 1941, many Russians regarded Hitler's invasion as a potential liberation, or at least potentially no worse than what they'd recently lived through. This is never spelled out, of course, but even raising it as a possibility got the film into trouble, leading to it be shelved for 15 years and earning German the first of many long career hiatuses. This was doubly unfortunate, because for nearly a decade the only publicly viewable film sporting German's name was one that was sharply inferior to one of the Soviet cinema's most striking solo debuts since Aleksandr Askoldov's similarly contentious (and similarly suppressed) The Commissar (1967).

So the first public glimpse of German the individual artist came in the late 1970s with the delayed release of Twenty Days Without War (1976), his second and final WWII film. Adapted from autobiographical stories by the veteran Konstantin Simonov (whose involvement in the film was instrumental in getting it greenlit), it depicted the effect of war on the day-to-day lives of civilians caught up in the maelstrom. This most sombre and reflective of German's films is set in Tashkent in 1942, its protagonist Lopatin an army major delivering a deceased colleague's personal effects to his widow – but that's merely a convenient hook for a much wider-ranging portrait of life on the home front, its grey-toned realism sharply contrasted with the propagandist 'heroism' of a film adapted from Lopatin's war correspondence. The choice of lead actor offers further contrast: having lost a similar battle a decade earlier, German cast the hugely popular comedy actor and circus clown Yuriy



Nikulin as Lopatin, a role surprisingly suited to his naturally mournful-looking face.

Twenty Days was also shelved, but only temporarily, and was acclaimed when it opened in 1977. However, the gaps between his features were steadily widening, and it took another five years before My Friend Ivan Lapshin started production and a further four before it was released in 1986 as one of the higher-profile cultural products of Mikhail Gorbachev's glasnost policy. Its high-profile disinterment gave German his first taste of an international reputation, boosted by an endorsement from the exiled and dying Tarkovsky. It was also the first glimpse of German's mature style, an assemblage of elaborately choreographed long takes, whose inhabitants are as likely to quote poetry, break into song or perform a once-popular political sketch as they are to engage in conventional conversation. This rich cultural stew, full of laughter and horseplay (when a fat woman threatens to report a neighbour to the authorities, he replies that he'll report her in turn for eating her husband), forms a vivid backdrop to the film's key theme as it emerges gradually and obliquely: life in the Soviet Union in the winter of 1935, just before Stalin's Terror changed everything.

CRIME AND PUNISHMENT Hard to Be a God (above); German's second and final WWII film Twenty Days Without War (1976, below left): and crime drama Mv Friend Ivan Lapshin (1986, below right), which gave German his first taste of an international reputation





Lapshin (Andrei Boltnev) is the town's chief of police ("our local Pinkerton"), his portrait fleshed out not via a conventional linear narrative but through temporally ambiguous flashbacks told by the admiring son of his close friend, with all that that implies in terms of romanticised embellishment. Wispy plot elements (tracking down a criminal gang, helping an actress research the character of a prostitute) play second fiddle to the extraordinarily detailed recreation of mid-30s Soviet life, the world in which German's father first made his literary reputation (his stories inspired his son's film). For the first and only time in German's career, he shot some sequences in colour, albeit of a decidedly low-key and desaturated variety, giving the effect of faded photographs. For many, especially outside Russia, this was their first German film, and comparisons were understandably drawn with Tarkovsky's Mirror from 1974 (part of which was also set in the paranoia-riddled mid-1930s) – although even then it was clear that German was more interested in the corporeal than the spiritual. For all the increasingly baroque extravagance of his *mise* en scène as his career progressed, he also maintained a hawk-like attention to historical detail: rather than fake a 1930s tram, he had the genuine article shipped from Leningrad to the set in Astrakhan, a distance of some 1,300 miles. German later complained that tracking down a dozen immaculate ZIS 110 limousines of the type used by Stalin and his entourage for his next film "cost me a year of my life".

After a stint from 1988-92 as the artistic director of the Studio of First and Experimental Films at Lenfilm, where his protégés included Aleksei Balabanov (later notorious for such taboo-challenging films as Brother, of Freaks and Men and Cargo 200), German spent much of the 1990s making his fourth solo feature Khrustalyov, *My Car!* (1998), interrupted by frequent shutdowns due to myriad funding difficulties: at one point, a muchneeded injection of French cash was swallowed by Russian hyperinflation. The film premiered at Cannes to a generally negative international reception and was little seen thereafter – although one hopes that the release of Hard to Be a God will prompt an urgent revision



In Russia, German's reputation is carved in granite: since Stalin's death, only Tarkovsky and Parajanov have garnered similar acclaim

DOCTOR IN TROUBLE German's last film before Hard to Be a God (above) was 1998's Khrustalyov, My Car! (below), the phantasmagorical tale of a Jewish doctor falsely accused of plotting against the authorities during the final days of Stalin's regime of a film that's every bit as dizzyingly hallucinatory as his final masterpiece.

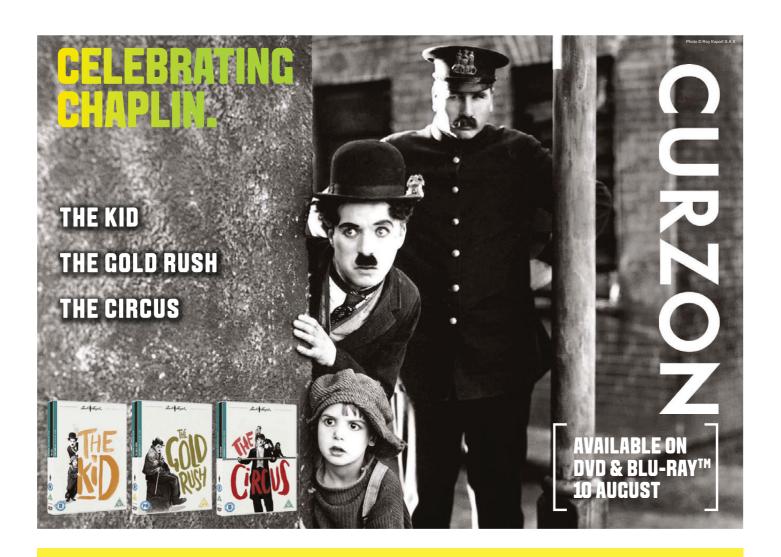
Although drawing his material from historical fact, German was more interested in creating a nightmarishly skewed vision of life under Stalinism at the pivotal point of the dictator's death, using that and the 'doctors' plot', which was intended to unleash a wave of anti-Semitic terror when a group of prominent Moscow doctors were publicly – and falsely – accused of conspiring to assassinate Soviet leaders. Khrustalyov, like Lapshin, has a position whereby he is expected to maintain order, in this case as one of Stalin's bodyguards. But although the film notionally has the closest association with historical fact of everything that German made (Vasily Khrustalyov was a real-life figure, the title evokes an order barked to him by the head of the secret police Lavrenti Beria, and the film's action takes place over the three days between Stalin's death and its public revelation), it's at this point that the director's already florid style becomes positively phantasmagorical. The film's protagonist is not Khrustalyov but General Klenski (Yuri Tsurilo, a shaven-headed giant who is also in Hard to Be a God), a brain surgeon well used to the environment of the madhouse but who finds that its hysteria, normally strictly contained, is spreading right across Moscow. Bulgakov, Gogol and Kafka would have grasped German's aims and achievement here: as with Hard to Be a God, he's far less interested in narrative coherence as he is in presenting a feverishly paranoid universe in forensic detail, his camera prowling along nameless corridors with the same fearful curiosity with which it negotiates the terrain of the planet Arkanar.

In Russia, German's artistic reputation is now carved in granite: out of all the major post-Stalin Soviet directors, only Tarkovsky and Sergei Parajanov have garnered similar acclaim. But he's still badly neglected in the English-speaking world, thanks to poor (indeed, mostly nonexistent) distribution and a consequent lack of critical attention. But any random snippet of *Hard to Be a God* unimpeachably establishes his credentials as a uniquely individual talent – indeed, one of the film's most distinctive features is the way that it offers not the slightest concession to any kind of contemporary taste. Like all of German's films, it's built to last. 6





Hard to Be a God is released in selected UK cinemas on 7 August and is reviewed on page 78







OUT OF THE CLOUDS

From acclaimed director Basil Dearden (*The Blue Lamp* and *The League of Gentlemen*) comes a bedazzling ensemble piece that encapsulates the early days of recreational aviation.



THE YELLOW RALLOOM

The Yellow Balloon is a tense British thriller from 1953 starring Kenneth More, Bernard Lee, Andrew Ray, Kathleen Ryan and Sid James.

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VITTORIO DE SICA: BEYOND NEOREALISM

His reputation might rest on his classic tales of poverty and struggle in post-war Italy, such as 'Bicycle Thieves' and 'Umberto D.', but in a versatile career that spanned more than 30 films as director and 150 as an actor, there is so much more that deserves our attention

By Pasquale lannone

Vittorio De Sica is best known for directing neorealist classics such as *Bicycle Thieves* (1948) and *Umberto D.* (1952) and for many critics, if not the ticket-buying public, he never managed to get back to those artistic heights. The consensus on his post-neorealist work was that it became too commercial and unambitious, and was far less rigorous. While there might be an element of truth to that, you can't help feeling that De Sica has not been given the recognition afforded to some of his contemporaries. Luchino Visconti and Roberto Rossellini, for instance, both had their post-neorealist crises, but their reputations remained fairly elevated into the 60s, 70s and beyond. An incorrigible self-deprecator, De Sica's humility ended up counting against him. While Visconti and Rossellini were all too aware of their talents as cineastes, gathering acolytes at home and abroad – Franco Zeffirelli and Francesco Rosi for Visconti, several of the French New Wave for Rossellini – the same couldn't be said for De Sica. It's not so much that he lacked confidence as a director, it's that he had a keen sense of what he was best at. His background as an actor both in the theatre and in film taught him that strong, affecting performances were key to the success of any drama and so his chief objective throughout his directorial career was to get the best out of his actors, be they superstars or unknowns, adults or children.

De Sica was undoubtedly one of cinema's great directors of actors. He was so good, in fact, that for years the joke in the industry was that he could even get a stone to act. He could coax incredible performances from untrained child actors such as Luciano De Ambrosis in *The Children Are Watching Us* (1944), Franco Interlenghi and

Rinaldo Smordoni in *Shoeshine* (1946), Enzo Staiola in Bicycle Thieves and Piero Bilancione in The Gold of Naples (1954). But he could just as skilfully direct career-best performances from stars such as Sophia Loren in Two Women (1960). "Watching and rewatching De Sica's films," writes the director Gianni Amelio in a short essay on The Gold of Naples, "I get the impression that he directed all his actors – even the most prestigious ones - like 'non-professionals'. In the sense that he stripped away from them any learned technique, any professional tricks, to dig deep into the person. He treated Loren and [Silvana] Mangano – who knows, even Paolo Stoppa and Totò – as if they were [Bicycle Thieves protagonist] Lamberto Maggiorani." Amelio goes on to clarify that this approach did not show a lack of respect on De Sica's part, but was rather "a gesture of faith in that precious something that the actor has within them but doesn't know it". There's no doubt that De Sica's appreciation of, and expertise in, the craft of acting shaped him as a director, so it's surprising how little critical attention has been paid to this aspect of his career.

De Sica was born in 1901 in Sora, a town in Italy's Lazio region, the third of four siblings. His father Umberto was Sardinian by birth and his mother Teresa hailed from Rome, but the family spent much of Vittorio's early years in Naples, a city with which he would always maintain a special affinity. Umberto, a bank worker, was an exuberant figure, even a little eccentric, and encouraged his children's artistic tendencies. In 1917, with Umberto's blessing, 16-year-old Vittorio made a brief appearance as the onscreen son of silent film diva Francesca Bertini in Alfredo De Antoni's *The Clemenceau Affair*, but

ROLE MODEL
Vittorio De Sica (right)
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FANTASTIC FOUR (Clockwise from top) De Sica's Miracle in Milan (1951), Marriage Italian Style (1964), Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (1963) and The Gold of Naples (1954)





this didn't immediately lead to more film roles. Instead, he went on to study accounting in Rome while continuing to act (and sing) in his spare time. He joined a student theatre group and on weekends he would perform Neapolitan songs for wounded soldiers at military hospitals, his father accompanying him on piano. After completing his studies, he applied for a job at Banca d'Italia, but a strong attraction to the theatre remained. When he heard from an actor friend that the iconoclastic Russian actress/director Tatiana Pavlova had set up an Italian-language theatre company, he asked for an introduction. He then went straight to his father and asked for his advice – should he go for the secure job at the bank or take the plunge and become an actor full time? Umberto, having noted and nurtured his son's talent from an early age, was unequivocal: Vittorio should be an actor.

De Sica played relatively minor roles during his time with Pavlova but it proved to be a fruitful entry into the profession. The company performed in major Italian cities and went on tour in South America. Needless to say, there couldn't have been a prouder father than Umberto; he invited friends and colleagues to his son's plays and would carry around cuttings of reviews ready to show anyone who asked about him.

By the early 1930s, De Sica had gained wide-ranging experience in various theatre companies and had also met his future wife Giuditta Rissone, six years his senior and already a major star. His first proper film roles started to roll in and he was soon approached by filmmaker Mario Camerini, who was looking to cast the lead for his latest picture What Scoundrels Men Are! (1932). In a collection of his autobiographical writings, La porta del cielo: memorie 1901-1952, De Sica describes the process of auditioning for the role of Bruno, a mechanic who's besotted by perfumer Mariuccia (Lia Franca): "Camerini wanted to fill out my hollow cheeks and asked the make-up artist to place cotton wool in both sides of my mouth. Visually, it worked well, but the sound I produced was terrible. Instead of 's' I pronounced 'f' and the letter 'r' seemed to have disappeared from my vocabulary altogether." They ended up abandoning the cotton wool idea and sent the audition to production company Cines. "Everyone was against me taking on the role," says De Sica, "everyone apart from Emilio Cecchi, who was then artistic consultant at Cines. Camerini was thus able to start filming What Scoundrels Men Are! with me as the protagonist." Camerini's film belongs to a category of pictures that would later become known as telefoni bianchi ('white telephones', a symbol of high-class luxury) and come under criticism from neorealist filmmakers and theorists for their supposed conservatism, frivolity and refusal to address pressing societal issues. This rather unnuanced view has rightly been challenged over the years, with many titles undergoing reappraisal.

Not only did *What Scoundrels Men Are!* turn out to be a major success for De Sica, setting him well on his way to becoming Italy's pre-eminent matinee idol, it also affirmed his talent as a singer. In the film, he performed a song that would become a standard of Italian 20th-century music, C.A. Bixio and Ennio Neri's 'Parlami d'amore, Mariù' ("Talk to Me of Love, Mariù'). De Sica and Camerini made several more pictures together, including *I'll Give a Million* (1935) *Il sianor Max* (1937) and *Department Store* (1939).





LIFE AFTER WARTIME De Sica was responsible for two of Italian neorealism's masterpieces, *Bicycle Thieves* (1948, far left) and *Umberto D.* (1952, left)

What really

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income was his

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more acting roles

De Sica directed his first film in 1940, a comedy called Rose scarlatte, which he made in tandem with Giuseppe Amato. He took on the project as a reaction to the poor critical reception of his performance in Manon Lescaut (Carmine Gallone, 1940). While recognising his own faults, he felt dissatisfied with Gallone's direction. After the success of *Rose scarlatte*, two more comedies in the Camerinian mould followed - the school-set Maddalena... zero in condotta (1941) and the Anna Magnani vehicle Doctor, Beware (1941). Like Rossellini, De Sica managed to get his early directing work by making films that weren't critical of the fascist regime, and in these first experiences behind the camera he showed great assurance. He was clear in his instructions and worked quickly and efficiently, traits that he carried throughout his directorial career.

SHRINKING THE CANVAS

In 1943, he began his long collaboration with screenwriter and theorist Cesare Zavattini with The Children Are Watching Us, a film often considered a key progenitor of neorealism. Rather than paint on a large canvas, De Sica and Zavattini's neorealist cinema turned its focus on small-scale human stories, on the lives of street children, workers and pensioners. Zavattini was convinced that everyday occurrences were as worthy of cinematic treatment as tales of sweeping high drama. What if - he suggests in the preface to his screenplay for Umberto D.-you could make a film about a woman buying a pair of shoes? "All you need to do is discover and show all the elements that make up this 'banal, everyday adventure' and it immediately becomes worthy of attention and therefore, 'spectacular." Despite the international acclaim for De Sica's neorealist films, audiences at home gravitated toward more escapist, commercial pictures. This meant that, at a time when his familial situation was becoming increasingly complex, producers in Italy became reluctant to fund his new projects.

De Sica had married Rissone in 1937 and the couple had a daughter, Emi. Just a few years later, on the set of *Un Garibaldino al convento* (1942), he met and fell in love with Spanish actress María Mercader, with whom he went on to have two children (Manuel and Christian). Divorce wasn't legalised in Italy until 1970, so De Sica kept two families, going back and forth between Rissone and Mercader, sometimes on a day-to-day basis (he must have been amazed, at gatherings at Rossellini's villa in the late 1950s, to find all of the latter's wives and children happily getting on under one roof). Despite his far

from straightforward family life, what really ate up De Sica's income was his gambling habit; it was this more than anything that led him to take on more and more acting roles.

Luckily, middle age had been more than kind to him. The hollow cheeks of his youth had filled out and, with a more robust frame and still fulsome head of hair, he exuded an effortless, easygoing gravitas, ideally suited to playing noblemen or authority figures – both straight and for laughs. He was cast as princes, dukes, marquises, counts and barons as well as generals, colonels, majors and marshals. He even played a cardinal (in Michael Anderson's The Shoes of the Fisherman in 1968) and a pope (in Abel Gance's Austerlitz in 1960). The money was certainly important, but De Sica never lost his enthusiasm for performance - both delivering his own and shaping those of others - and this carried him through even the most pedestrian picture. He saw it as a bonus when he was given the opportunity to work with actors of the calibre of Totò, Alberto Sordi, Marcello Mastroianni and Sophia Loren. Some of his most internationally successful post-neorealist films as director featured Loren - Two Women; Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow (1963); Marriage Italian Style (1964) – and few filmmakers managed to get more out of her as an actress. "He kept me under control," Loren writes in her 2014 autobiography. "He'd pull me back down if I flew too high, he'd lift me up if I was too dejected... He knew how to apply pressure on my feelings with a skill that really turned me into a woman, so distant from the glamour of stardom."

So how did De Sica fit in with the global new wave cinemas of the 1960s and 70s? His work was surely a world away from the political and sexual subversiveness of Pier Paolo Pasolini, the autobiographical dream worlds of Federico Fellini, the glacial modernism of Antonioni. The short answer is, he didn't – which is why his films were deemed passé by the intelligentsia of the time. For his part, De Sica was generally unimpressed with those who thought of themselves as great innovators. It irked him when other filmmakers didn't show the humility he did. It's telling that one of the few films from international new wave cinema that he genuinely enthused about was John Huston's low-key boxing drama Fat City (1972). He saw it at the cinema just months before his death and greatly admired its understated power; he felt it was a picture he himself could have made back in his 1940s heyday. 6

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The season 'Vittorio De Sica: Realism and Romance' runs throughout August at BFI Southbank, London

Wide Angle

PREVIEW

TRIUMPH OF THE WOOL

Joseph Cornell, famous for his shadow boxes, left behind a collection of film material that included unsuspected treasures

By Anne Morra

During his years as a working artist, Joseph Cornell routinely rejected the labels critics, curators and collectors tried to assign to him. He was a prolific collage artist, diarist and maker of 'shadow boxes' – the glass-fronted cabinets in which he assembled collections of bric-à-brac, toys, photographs and other found objects; he used a similar technique of assembling found materials to make a number of films.

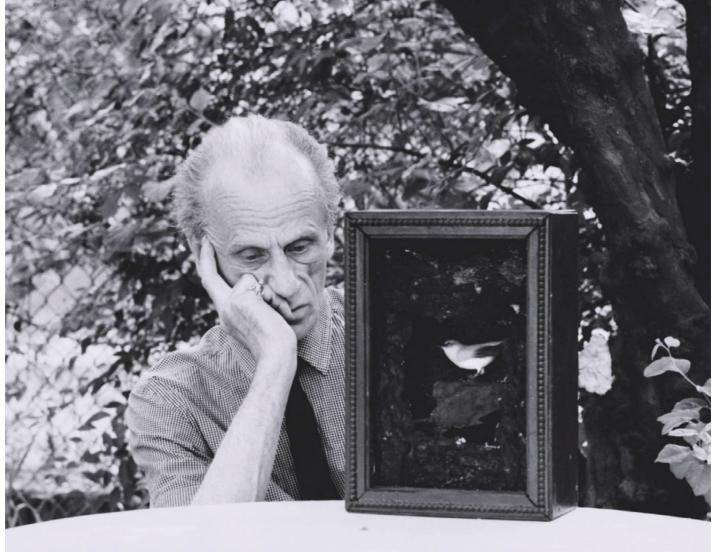
In 1936, when Alfred H. Barr Jr, director of the Museum of Modern Art in New York, was organising the exhibition 'Fantastic Art, Dada, Surrealism', he was intent on including the early box *Untitled* (Soap Bubble Set), which had been made that year; but Cornell, while thankful for Barr's support, dismissed any interest in membership in the league of Surrealism. The gallery owner Julien Levy referred to Cornell's wooden boxes as adult toys and eagerly sold them during the holiday season in 1932. Others labelled Cornell a practising craft artist. But Cornell defied pigeonholing; he did not belong to any 'ism', could not be placed in a neat art-historical portfolio.

Cornell was not trained at the academy and did not travel to Paris or Italy to study the early masters. He was an autodidact who venerated the ballet, literature, history, music, theatre and the movies. His boxes managed to blend fluently his cherished muses with small toys, seashells, inexpensive objects from second-hand shops and collage, creating an inescapable daydream quality. *Untitled (Soap Bubble Set)* is a simple wooden shadow box with four glass shelves divided into seven compartments, holding a white clay

pipe, a robin's egg in a wine glass, a small doll's head painted pale blue, an ancient map of the moon and a row of four white cylinders, one decorated with the collaged image of the planet Saturn above an ancient city, another with a rider on a spirited horse. The box's meaning and purpose are left open to interpretation and contemplation. Along with the wooden toys, junk-shop detritus, maps and ornithological imagery, Cornell incorporated likenesses of ballerinas, dancehall maidens, opera divas and movie stars. From Hedy Lamarr to Lauren Bacall, Cornell's most influential muse was the cinema.

He was not a typical filmmaker. He did not

Opening the can listed as 'Collage Fragments', we were like Charlie Bucket stumbling on the Golden Ticket



Thinking inside the box: Joseph Cornell at home in Flushing, Queens, New York, 1967

operate a camera. He wrote two screenplays, but the films he made were more like storyboards using stereopticon cards than motion pictures. His most accomplished film, Rose Hobart (circa 1936), is made of fragments from the 1931 Universal feature East of Borneo, directed by George Melford. From this black-and-white travel-adventure film, starring Charles Bickford and Rose Hobart, Cornell extracted mainly footage of Hobart, on whom he had a crush. The running time was reduced to 17 minutes, and the soundtrack replaced with a loop of Brazilian music by Nestor Amaral and His Orchestra. Cornell inserted into the now Hobart-centric short small bits of footage from travelogues he collected, as well as nature films and silent comedies. The result, premiered at the Julien Levy Gallery in New York City in December 1936, was projected through a blue glass filter to provide yet another layer of dissonance.

In 1995 the Joseph and Robert Cornell Memorial Foundation donated to MoMA a large collection of Cornell's film material – more than 300 cans of mainly 16mm film. The Cornell collection remained safely in storage, with a rather incomplete assessment of the true contents until April 2011.

In 2003, scrutinising the filmography that P. Adams Sitney compiled for the catalogue of the 1980 Cornell exhibition at MoMA, I saw that the entry for the 1965 short Flushing Meadows noted "present whereabouts unknown" (Flushing Meadows is a colour silent film which Cornell made to commemorate Joyce Hunter, a young runaway he had befriended in the Times Square area of New York City, and who was murdered in 1964). Going back to the inventory, I found Flushing Meadows listed. On inspection, the 16mm material turned out to be a Kodachrome reversal original (reversal film produces a positive image on a transparent base, instead of the usual negative image). This reel was the original film Cornell directed his collaborator Larry Jordan to load into the camera: if there were any other reels of *Flushing Meadows* out in the world, they were all made from this very source material. We had found the Holy Grail. MoMA received help from the National Film Preservation Foundation (NFPF) to preserve the short and make a new 16mm negative and access copies. I was hooked.

I proposed a five-year project to hand-inspect and view every reel of film in the Cornell film collection, a process that commenced on 26 April 2011. Peter Williamson, a long-time MoMA film conservator, and I picked our first can of 16mm film from the pile sitting by the KEM machine – a motorised flatbed editing table and viewer that handled the material very gently. This can turned out to contain a 16mm black-and-white print of the film A Legend for Fountains. Wearing white gloves and holding the film lightly, Peter and I noted down the number of splice marks visibly printed in from the source material, the placement of lines from the Lorca poem 'Your Childhood in Menton' that provided the film's title, and a sign above a doorway on a Greenwich Village street, referring to the Monarch Doll Corp. We calculated the total footage and moved on to the second can.

It wasn't until five months later that we opened



Frames from The Wool Collage

the can listed as 'Collage Fragments'. We were like Charlie Bucket stumbling on the Golden Ticket. Initial inspection showed that it was a 16mm, silent, black-and-white and tinted print, 804 feet long. The print itself was heavily scratched, some of the footage was severely shrunken, and in sections a black fog pervaded the edges of the frame. As we burrowed further, the puzzle began to reveal itself. Cornell had spliced together different stocks from various decades. There was Kodak film stock from 1924-55, along with one undated section of Ansco film stock; the bulk of the stock probably dated from the 30s and 40s - we knew that Cornell purchased excess film reels and discarded footage from film storage facilities in Fort Lee, New Jersey, at that time. Most of the reel was black-and-white footage, with certain sections using tinted amber, pale amber or yellow stock. Some footage contained intertitles - as in other films, Cornell had edited these to the point where they could be considered 'flash' titles, going by so quickly as to almost not register with the viewer. Sometimes he cheekily inserted the titles upside down.

The main part of the reel was images from



Cornell's Untitled (Tilly Losch), c. 1935

the 20s or 30s of a shepherd shearing his sheep and taking the wool to market; the wool is seen being processed in a vast factory somewhere in the US. Cornell intercut footage from what we later learned was the 1925 film of *Les Misérables*, choosing scenes of the imperial court wearing opulent velvet robes, as well as battle scenes from *The Eagle of the Sea* (1926). All this culminates in a modern-day fashion show, a mother and child sitting on a plush upholstered sofa.

From the many splices on the reel it was clear that Cornell was deliberately dividing the film into some sort of hierarchy or chapters. Sitting side by side at the KEM machine, Peter and I realised simultaneously that Cornell was telling a story, using disparate parts carefully selected from other films to expand his fairytale. The film began to unfold as an allegory of the humble shepherd who nurtures the sheep and brings the wool to town so that it can be processed into luxurious velvet fabric to be worn by kings. Intercutting splices from other films – an industrial short illustrating the manufacture of upholstery fabric by Collins & Aikman Wool Processors of Michigan, a massive sea octopus eating a lobster, and Jean Valjean in tattered clothes, perpetually on the verge of starvation - Cornell constructs, perhaps unconsciously, a canny short film with a compelling socio-political commentary.

This film did not exist on any filmography, nor could we find anything written about it. Repeated viewing convinced us we had found a completed film, perhaps one that Cornell had never publicly screened or announced. Assigning a possible production date was difficult, with no evidence apart from the film stock edge codes. We knew that Cornell had made Rose Hobart around 1936 and had tinkered with other collage films in the 1940s; and by the mid-50s, when Cornell engaged with Stan Brakhage, Rudy Burckhardt and later Larry Jordan to assist his filmmaking efforts, his work on film collages was more than likely done. We concluded that the date range of production was 1940-55. The NFPF again generously funded the project, allowing us to photochemically preserve the film; we made a new 16mm polyester picture negative as well as a few prints for exhibition and access. The preserved film, officially known as Untitled Joseph Cornell Film (The Wool Collage) premiered at MoMA on 1 November 2014.

We are now in the fourth year of our project to inspect all the reels in the Cornell film collection. The stacks of cans are beginning to dwindle. There have been other moments of excitement, as when we found footage of Cornell himself directing the actress Suzanne Miller on set. Perhaps two more reels may turn out to be previously unknown Cornell collage films, similar in style to *The Wool Collage*, but we have no new findings to announce yet. Peter and I need to sit at the KEM and look at those reels again and again until they reveal their mysteries. That is how Cornell intended his art. He wrote in his diary of his "quest – the forever striving to give form to the wondrous". §



The Wool Collage and other Joseph Cornell films screen at BFI Southbank, London, on 3 September. The exhibition 'Joseph Cornell: Wanderlust' runs at the Royal Academy, London, until 27 September

RUNNING WITH THE HEARD

For once, the focus was on the sounds rather than the pictures, at the 'Listening Cinematically' conference

By Robert Hanks

Music and sound, as any professional practitioner will grumble if you give them a chance, usually come a long way down the list of priorities when a film is being made. They also come a long way down when film is being talked about: according to Martin Barker, one of the pioneers of research into film audiences, Alien has inspired at least 107 academic papers, and not one of them deals with the music – even though it's one of Jerry Goldsmith's most effective and (you'd have thought) memorable scores.

Barker was speaking at 'Listening Cinematically', a two-day conference held earlier this summer at Royal Holloway College (RHUL) in Surrey. For Carlo Cenciarelli, the organiser, there were questions to be asked about the changing role of sound since the "digital turn", and about what, if anything, the term 'cinematic listening' might mean; and I suppose those were the sorts of questions I was expecting to find answers to, or the beginnings of answers. As it turned out, those topics never really came up, though an almost bewildering number of related ones did: music in 'timekiller' video games, the Hollywood composer biopic, 'high fidelity' and the New Hollywood soundtrack... plus more references to diegesis (mostly sceptical) and Michel Chion (mostly adoring) than you could shake a fisher boom at.

Two topics cropped up repeatedly. The first was sound in the silent era. According to Birkbeck film professor Ian Christie, one of the star names at the conference, while there is a lot of legend and hearsay about what went on at the cinema before the era of synchronised sound, "I sense a sort of avoiding of the issue of what the experience was like." RHUL's Julie Brown tackled this to some extent in a wide-ranging talk on 'Listening at the "silent" cinema': no film was ever truly silent, but the kind of sonic experience varied according to country, exhibitor, individual film; possibilities included reading, music (live or mechanically reproduced), sound effects (ditto), live synchronised dialogue, lectures... And since a silent film was not recording a silent world, other sounds were implied or imagined: babies crying, sirens wailing, dogs barking, musicians playing, words murmured or declaimed. Brown offered a couple of fascinating examples of implied sound. In Méliès's threeminute fantasy skit Le Mélomane (1903), the title character (usually translated as 'The Music Lover') notates music by tossing his own magically self-replicating head on to telegraph cables that act as staves. In Frederick Laurence's score for the Russian fantasy Morozko (1926), which Brown rediscovered, the music follows the supposed speech: when the intertitles offer the phrase "Are you warm dear lady?", the music mimics the cadence of the sentence (compare Steve Reich's method in Different Trains, in which fragments of speech became tiny motifs for a



Keeping the score: Cecil B. DeMille's Carmen, designed to be accompanied by Bizet's music

string quartet, or Ronnie Hazlehurst's trick of fitting TV theme tunes to the programme title).

We tend to assume that Al Jolson's primal declaration that "You ain't heard nothin' yet" came as a revelation to silent audiences; but according to Jim Buhler of the University of Texas, some – how many is impossible to tell – saw synchronised sound as a step backwards. That was not just because they believed, like Norma Desmond or the critic Gilbert Seldes, that sound compromised a visual art, but also because the new sound was standardised, flat, mechanical. Buhler quoted the poet Hilda Doolittle ('H.D.'), complaining in 1927 that synchronised sound made characters artificial, turning a doll into a robot: "I didn't like my ghost-love to become so vibrantly incarnate." It reads as if she had come early to the notion of the uncanny valley, that supposed point on a graph where mannequins become lifelike enough to repel us. Brown's talk also included a fable from



Le Mélomane

The sad truth is that most filmgoers ignore the music – except at moments that have particular personal significance

Bioscope magazine about Pamela, who goes to the cinema to watch a film and has no sense of what music she's been hearing, and Percival, a music enthusiast, who thinks the band is the main event, the film a distraction. This turned out to be a link to the conference's second big theme, the relationship or otherwise between cinema and concert hall. Christie's paper concentrated on the presentation of classical music in silent cinema – in particular, Cecil B. DeMille's 1915 Carmen, which starred the opera singer Geraldine Farrar, and was performed, at least some of the time, by a full orchestra playing a specially prepared version of Bizet's score: for Christie's



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(as in Maurice Jarre's score for Lawrence of Arabia), intermission and entr'acte (such as Dimitri Tiomkin's 'Ballad of the Alamo' in the 1960 film, which provides a three-minute break before the climactic battle). Emilio Audissino, a self-styled "John Williams stalker" at the University of Southampton, talked about the *ancrage* effect of films on music – the extent to which our appreciation of a piece relies on (or is distorted by) the images it has accompanied: an effect real enough, I would have thought, to invalidate Audissino's contention that misgivings about concert performances of film music are rooted purely in obsolete 19th-century categories. Jeremy Barham, from the University of Surrey, discussed the modern trend for screening classic films with live orchestral accompaniment, something that's been done with (or to) films as diverse as Ratatouille, Breakfast at Tiffany's and 2001: A Space Odyssey. This last film came up again when Keele's Jonathan Godsall talked about the ways a film can change perceptions of a pre-existing piece of music – his point made neatly by a collage of 40-some years of covers of recordings of Also sprach Zarathustra, a strikingly repetitive mash-up of sunrises and astronomical bodies that had everything to do with Kubrick, little to do with Strauss or Nietzsche. Godsall was interesting, too, on the specific ways classical music is altered for the screen – the repetitiousness of Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto within Brief Encounter, how a short excerpt from the William Tell overture became brasher and oh, so much longer in Gore Verbinski's The Lone Ranger. Other highlights, in a very crowded College, Cambridge, on Humphrey Jennings's peculiar act of translation in The Silent Village

money, an improvement on the staged opera. The

Open University's Ben Winters recalled the once

fashionable, now defunct practice of composing parts of a soundtrack for pure listening – overture

Other highlights, in a very crowded programme, included Gavin Williams, from Jesus College, Cambridge, on Humphrey Jennings's peculiar act of translation in *The Silent Village* (1943), recreating the wartime massacre of the Czech village of Lidice in a Nazi-occupied south Wales, 'Czechs' speaking Welsh, 'Germans' speaking English; Cenciarelli's very funny dissection of the clichéd symbolism of the personal stereo in romcoms, where it signifies both adolescent detachment and, when shared, intimacy and romance; and Barker on what audience research tells us about reactions to film music: the sad truth is that most filmgoers ignore the music – except at moments that have particular personal significance; then, music can become a vital element of the whole experience.

Perhaps because it was organised via the music department, the conference leaned overwhelmingly towards music: I wasn't the only attendee who wished we could have covered other kinds of noise – for example, styles of speech, sound effects, how we react to foreign languages and dubbing – as well as that fundamental question of what 'cinematic listening' might involve. Cenciarelli hopes to give the conference some kind of afterlife – a follow-up workshop, turning the website into a research portal. I hope so too: the conference showed that there is a phenomenal amount to explore in the realm of film sound, and still plenty that can surprise us. §

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

A century after one of his best films premiered to convicts, the director Maurice Tourneur is criminally neglected



Tourneur classic movie: the premiere of Alias Jimmy Valentine at Sing Sing prison in 1915

By Christine Leteux

Just over 100 years ago, on 14 February 1915, a film premiere took place in an unlikely spot – Sing Sing prison. Valentine's Day was chosen on purpose: the film was called Alias Jimmy Valentine. The 1,700 inmates crowded the penitentiary chapel for the screening and they whistled, stamped and shouted their appreciation of the work; after all, the film's hero was a safecracker. But why did the World Film Corporation choose to present their latest work in such a place, in front of such a public? It was partly a thankyou to the inmates, who had participated as extras. But the press coverage suggests it was also a brilliant publicity stunt.

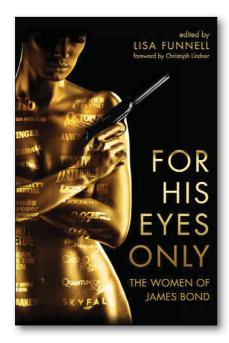
If Alias Jimmy Valentine elicited laughs and vivid approval from the convicts, it was mostly due to the work of a French director who had arrived in the United States barely six months earlier. Maurice Tourneur came to America in May 1914 after two undistinguished years directing at the French company Éclair. In the US he blossomed: after only five pictures for World he had risen from obscurity to be a "master of photoplay direction", as he was dubbed in one review of Alias Jimmy Valentine. Just how is something of a mystery. My guess is that he found the perfect environment for his many talents - freedom to innovate, excellent equipment and a great crew. Tourneur, cameraman John van den Broek and art director Ben Carré worked together for four years continuously, producing several masterpieces. Tourneur had worked as a painter before joining the theatre as an actor and stage manager; he knew about picture composition, set design and directing actors. His artistic personality, and a natural authority, were essential for reassuring producers.

At that time, I loved cinema. I stopped loving it when it became a cooperative activity

Alias Jimmy Valentine is a perfect showcase for the qualities that made Tourneur unique in the film industry of the teens. He had total control of his picture, preparing the adaptation and continuity, working closely with cameraman and art director, and editing the film himself. It was based on a play by Paul Armstrong (itself inspired by an O. Henry short story) but Tourneur gave it a naturalistic flavour far away from the stage. A good part of the film was shot on locations in New York and Ossining, up the Hudson River, where Sing Sing is located. **Tourneur got permission from warden Thomas** Mott Osborne to shoot inside the penitentiary, his lead actor Robert Warwick mingling with inmates. As for the studio sets, he innovated by asking Carré to build the connecting rooms of a bank; he then had a platform built right under the studio glass roof, from which van den Broek, with Tourneur perched on the scaffold beside him, could shoot an impressive chase and fight, the action in the various rooms happening simultaneously under the spectator's eyes (Fritz Lang reproduced the scene in the crime drama Die Spinnen in 1919). Combining a documentary atmosphere and striking lighting effects with humour and naturalistic acting, Alias Jimmy Valentine was one of the best pictures of 1915 and remains a landmark in the history of gangster films.

Tourneur went on making films until 1948, but his career is largely forgotten, overshadowed by that of his son, Jacques, director of Cat People and Out of the Past. Decades later, recalling those early happy days, he said: "At that time, I loved cinema. I stopped loving it when it became a cooperative activity. At that time, the director was the master of the house. He did what he wanted. He had a small rowing boat he could take anywhere he wanted. It was cheap. He could explore small tributaries. But when it started to cost millions, it became impossible. I think filmmaking should reflect the thoughts of an individual, his feelings, and should never be like factory work."

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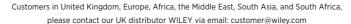
Edited by Lisa Funnell

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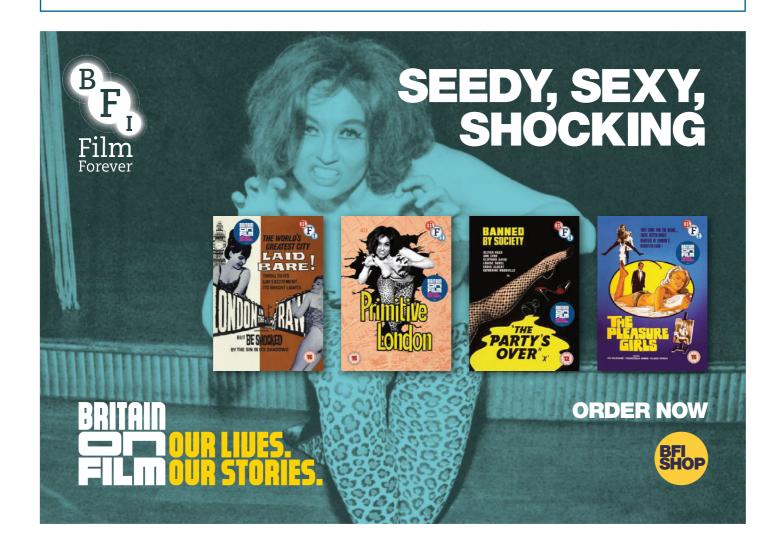
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ARMIES IN THE SHADOWS

The Greek referendum and Latin American dictatorships cast long shadows at this year's edition of FIDMarseille

By Neil Young

The word from Athens reached Marseille at sunset, and that word was oxi—'no'. The Greeks' emphatic rejection of the EU bailout package was the most startling negative referendum result since the 1988'no' that unseated the Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet and inspired Pablo Larraín's Oscarnominated 2012 satire with that title.

As darkness fell, confirmation of the unexpected 61 per cent-39 per cent landslide – British bookies had made *nai* (yes) the oddson favourite – quickly spread. It dominated pre-screening chatter at the Théâtre Silvain, tucked away in a bosky seaside valley and the most atmospheric of the eight venues used by the Festival international de cinéma de Marseille, aka FIDMarseille, aka FID.

After 26 editions, FID is established as an offbeat highlight of the discerning cinephile's calendar, renowned for idiosyncratic, adventurous programming. Shorts and midlength works are accorded the same status as features; experimentally tinged fare is encouraged, and scheduled alongside essayistic/poetic documentaries and 'straight' fictions. This year's festival was book-ended by two Cannes hits, Corneliu Porumboiu's *The Treasure* and Miguel Gomes's *Arabian Nights: The Enchanted One*.

The exclusion of the public from nearly all screenings at Cannes makes it in effect a glorified trade-fair; so FID can plausibly claim to be France's leading true film festival. Held in a city founded by Greek colonists — and where the Hellenic blue-and-white remains ubiquitous, as the colours of the local football team Olympique de Marseille — the festival eschews closed press and industry screenings. Tickets are democratically priced at a maximum of $\varepsilon 6$ (£4.30).

FID's biggest gathering is a one-off projection at the 3,000-capacity Silvain: this year, Patricio Guzmán's documentary *The Pearl Button*, winner of the Silver Bear for best script at Berlin. At one point, Guzmán recounts the practice of the junta that ruled Chile from 1973-90 of dropping handcuffed victims into the Pacific from aeroplanes; the excesses of reactionary dictatorships were to be a recurring theme of FID XXVI.

Anita Leandro's *Identification Photos* (*Retratos de identificação*) isolates one example of the brutal treatment meted out to Latin American dissidents in an era when CIA-backed regimes routinely repressed, tortured and 'disappeared' their citizens. Leandro focuses on her native Brazil, where the military ruled from 1964-85, through the harrowing story of Maria Barcellos. Arrested, brutalised and humiliated, Barcellos was eventually deported to Chile, only to flee after Pinochet's coup in 1973.

Leandro's is a sober, urgent brand of cinejournalism, powerful if – by FID standards – relatively conventional in form. Jonathan Perel's



Anita Leandro's Identification Photos

Toponymy (Toponimia), however, presents a bold fusion of form and content, to cumulatively stunning effect. An admirer of James Benning, Perel, a 38-year-old Argentinian, brilliantly brings the American maestro's mathematically informed brand of landscape scrutiny to bear upon the painful history of his country, a dictatorship from 1976-83. He starts with four villages constructed during the mid-1970s in the mountainous Tucumán region where, in what was called 'Operativo Independencia', the army crushed a rural rebellion, forcibly resettling survivors in standardised flat-land settlements under 24-hour 'protection'. To document today's pueblos Perel deploys a grid-like, repetitive approach from which, once or twice, he subtly and crucially departs. As a chronicle of human triumph over uniformity, *Toponymy* is a quietly magnificent use of cinema; it deserves to be recognised as a milestone of its genre and to propel Perel into the front rank of the globe's (younger) filmmakers.

Since 1944 western Europe has been largely spared the horrors routinely visited upon Latin America, though it's worth remembering that Spanish, Portuguese and Greek dictatorships persisted well into the 1970s. The architecture of the Franco era (1936-75) is surveyed engagingly in Guillermo G. Peydró's *The City of Work (La ciudad de trabajo*), through a gigantic education or indoctrination centre in Gijón that remains Spain's largest building. Meanwhile, the impact of Salazar's 'Estado Novo' ('New State', 1933-74) in



Jonathan Perel's 'brilliant' Toponymy

Leandro's is a sober, urgent brand of cine-journalism, powerful if — by FID standards relatively conventional in form

Portugal, is indirectly evident in the filmography of FID XXVI's retrospective subject, the late Manoel de Oliveira, whose lengthy career featured several politically imposed hiatuses.

It is no coincidence that Portugal, Spain and Greece should still struggle economically and socially, of course: the Colonels' 1967-74 junta cast painful shadows over Greece in later decades — and the recent electoral successes of the neo-fascist Golden Dawn illustrate extremism's stubborn persistence. This is also evident much closer to FIDMarseille's home turf: in 2014's local elections, the ultra-right Front National obtained over a quarter of the vote in this bustlingly multi-ethnic city.

Historical ironies and connections abound: France's exploits in Algeria during the 1954-62 war provided Argentina's military with their barbaric playbook during Operativo Independencia. And among the consequences of losing Algeria was the creation by French conservatives of thuggish militias – most notoriously the SAC (Service d'action civique), whose career culminated in the 'Auriol Massacre' of 1981, when Marseille police detective Jacques Massié and his entire family were slaughtered.

SAC's co-founder Charles Pasqua – later Chirac's minister of the interior – died on the eve of FID, aged 88. Amid obituaries euphemistically mentioning his "hardline" ideology, Pasqua received an elaborate Paris memorial service at which mourners included his protégé Nicolas Sarkozy. British bookmakers have Sarko as 2/I favourite to regain the presidency in 2017, with the Front National's Marine Le Pen as short as 4/I. Such prognostication has its perils, of course – as proven by events that sultry Sunday evening when bookies, pundits and Angela Merkel alike were confounded by what Jean-Luc Godard would call "problèmes de type grec". §

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THE EXCAVATOR

Intellectually sophisticated, moving between documentary and fiction, the films of Louis Henderson grapple with big ideas

By Sukhdev Sandhu

Archaeology, according to Dieter Roelstraete, curator and editor of *The Way of the Shovel* (2013), is the modern mode. Blame it on the internet, which recirculates lost or forgotten visual culture. Or perhaps it's the postideological exhaustion of modern politics that drives artists to go back across history to revel in the energy of utopian and progressive projects. The English filmmaker Louis Henderson (b.1983) loves archaeology too. "My grandparents were both archaeologists and I grew up in that culture. Even at the age of seven I was supposed to be an archaeologist."

Henderson, who is based in Paris, has quietly built up an impressive body of essayistic work — territorially diverse, intellectually sophisticated, moving between documentary and fiction — that deals with big issues: technology, legacies of empire, infrastructural aesthetics, historical amnesia. Archaeology underpins it all. "I try to make stratigraphic images," he says, referring to a branch of geology that studies layers of rock. "The camera is a tool of excavation. But I'm also trying to search for situations and locations that have a certain stratigraphic layering of temporalities."

A case in point is Logical Revolts (2012) in which the narrator's friend (named 'Henderson') travels across Egypt in order to find all the places referenced in Blue Vanguard (1957), a film about the previous year's Suez Crisis. The film, on which Thorold Dickinson worked, was produced for the United Nations by the National Film Board of Canada, but upon completion was banned and left unscreened for many decades. Its treatment of Israeli militancy and of UK and French bombing of Arab cities has obvious echoes in the present moment.

Logical Revolts, shot at a time of revolutionary changes in Egypt, is partly about the difficulty of grasping or visualising revolution. It's also a meditation on the thinness of the outsider's or ethnographer's gaze. 'Henderson', almost comically, oscillates between wanting to shoot urban landscapes from a distance and then, in the hope of achieving some kind of "molecular breakdown", at close range. Communicating with his chum via film clips, postcards and emails, he increasingly fails to penetrate the region and worries that locals see him as a stranger. He ends up in the desert, staring at rocks, and disappears — like a character in a Conrad novel or a Herzog film.

Henderson's uncle was the photographer Nigel Henderson (1917-1985), a member of the Independent Group and one of the artists featured in the pathbreaking 'This Is Tomorrow' exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1956. A Walk with Nigel (2010) is a split-screen work in which he counterposes Nigel's photographs of East End London in the 1950s with contemporary video sequences he shot himself. Henderson says his uncle's influence extends even further.



Revolution in the air: Logical Revolts

"Nigel was interested in uncovering the poetic potential of waste. After the war he used to go on bomb sites and pick up glass and scrap metal from which he'd make photograms. He thought of himself as an editor, just as I think of myself as a post-production artist sifting through waste."

Waste is one of the central themes in Henderson's best-known film *Lettres du voyant* (2013). Set in modern-day Ghana, it explores the phenomenon of *sakawa* – the practice of young urban dwellers returning to the countryside in order to get priestly blessings for the digital scams they intend to unleash on Western recipients. Moodily gripping, with a nod to Jean Rouch's *Les Maîtres fous* (1956), it sees *sakawa* as less a criminal activity than a conceptual

My grandparents were both archaeologists and I grew up in that culture. Even at seven I was supposed to be an archaeologist



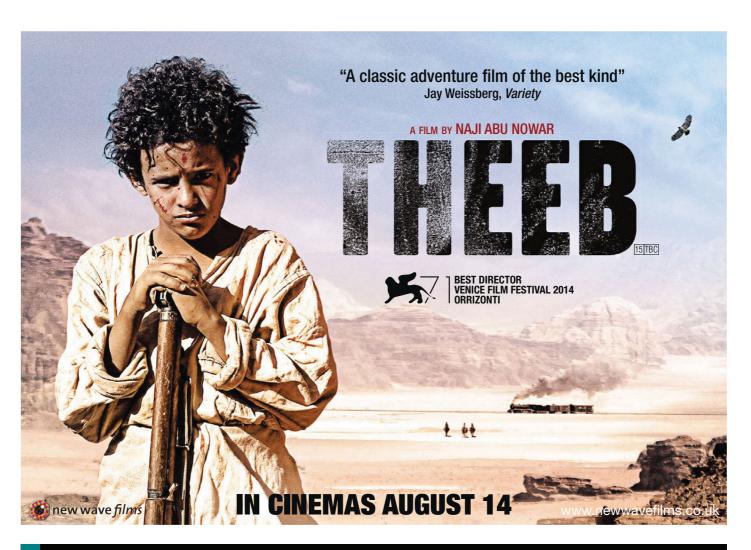
Digging deep: Louis Henderson

tool that collapses the gulf between rural and metropolitan, religious and secular, the old and the new, the local and the transnational.

Certain scenes – a dog sacrifice, clumps of men stooped over piles of obsolescent First World computers – linger in the imagination. But this is not a film about slum urbanism or the abjection of the Global South. The circuit-board disassemblers in Jennifer Baichwal and Edward Burtynsky's Manufactured Landscapes (2006) were portrayed as members of an international technoproletariat; here – according to a narrator who may be a Ghanaian, a sakawan, a machine-spirit - they and the region's tunnelling gold-miner are invoked as astronomers and time-travellers. They harvest information that American computer users have failed to delete and then, adopting new identities, move through deep-ocean cables and beyond national boundaries, to remerge - almost in animistic fashion - in First World inboxes.

Seen in this light, *Lettres du voyant* can be seen as a companion piece to *The Last Angel of History* (1995) by the Black Audio Film Collective, a key work of Afro-futurist poetics that speculated on the relationship between music, history and racial identity in the digital age. Henderson, who includes a visual reference to Black Audio's *Handsworth Songs* (1986) in *Logical Revolts*, used to be a dancehall reggae DJ, and is also interested in the ways that styles of bass music such as hip-hop and techno can function as cultural resistance.

Henderson's most recent film *Black Code/ Code Noir* (2015) brings together scattered but interrelated violence – the murders by police of Michael Brown and Kajieme Powell in Missouri, the lives of black Americans after the Civil War, the wretched treatment of Haitians before the 1804 Revolution – to explore the ways in which political networks and supposedly neutral data systems have quashed slaves and their descendants. Like all Henderson's films, it's a historical deep-dive, a political probe, an excavation without ready-grab resolution. §











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81 Manglehorn

David Gordon Green doesn't think to shrink Pacino's star persona down to the scale of ordinary people — the very idea of 'ordinary people' doesn't seem to have occurred to him



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Eye of the storm: Marshland explores the faultlines that lie beneath the surface during Spain's transition to democracy following Franco's death

Marshland

Spain 2014 Director: Alberto Rodríguez Certificate 15 104m 8s

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

The opening of Alberto Rodríguez's sixth feature shows an aerial view of the Guadalquivir marshes, the delta that leads from the Guadalquivir River into the Atlantic Ocean. From above, it looks like a twisted intestine or the interior of a human brain, a jigsaw of intersecting arteries. It's an area that produces around 40 per cent of Spain's rice crop, and a place of spectacular natural beauty, home to the Doñana National Park, designated a Unesco World Heritage Site. Rodríguez's focus, however, is not on the landscape as tourist vista. Rather, he invites us to probe beneath the veneer of this immense inhospitable terrain through the narrative of a pair of detectives sent from Madrid in 1980 to investigate the disappearance (soon revealed to be the brutal murder) of two sisters from the small town of Villafranco.

The experienced detective Juan (an impressively offhand Javier Gutiérrez) and his idealistic partner Pedro (Raúl Arévalo) are first seen making their way through an evening fairground as horns and bugles mingle with screams and the noise of the rides. Their car has broken down and, as they stumble into town,

the layered sounds and murky visuals leave the viewer as disorientated as the two detectives.

The men's late arrival at their hotel means that one of their rooms has been reallocated. Dim interiors and the dour attitude of the hotel owner testify to an insular community. Television images register domestic unrest and social protest, evidence of a nation grappling with the testing transition from dictatorship to democracy. The fleeting glance of a banner referencing the ultra-rightwing Fuerza Nueva (New Force) party among the televised protesters points to the palpable legacy of a Francoist ideology that lives on in the aptly named Villafranco.

This is not the first time that Rodríguez has opted to go back to the 1980s as a mode of reflecting on the fissures in Spain's democratic present. In *Unit* 7 (2012), the (mis)adventures of a drug-trafficking unit in the build-up to Seville's 1992 World Expo showed the country's democracy to be rooted in corruption and compromised collaboration with informants and criminals. Even After (2009), which was set in the present, portrayed a generation of infantilised adults obsessed with instant gratification, unable to cope with responsibilities and with no view of the long-term consequences of their actions – a revealing comment on the factors that led Spain to its most devastating recession in modern history. With Marshland, Rodríguez crafts a brilliant, compelling edge-of-your-seat

detective thriller infused with a spirit of uncanny gothic redolent of David Lynch and David Fincher. There are chase sequences across both water and land, and red herrings that set up a range of plausible suspects and avenues, leading the detectives into a labyrinth as confusing as the waterways themselves. Frequently the viewer is given a bird's-eye view of the action, a privileged vantage-point from which we can scrutinise the map-like images of the remote wetlands.

Rodríguez and DP Alex Catalán's shadowy visuals reference the Seville photographer Atín Aya, whose stark black-and-white images capture the eerie qualities of the marshlands and their inhabitants. Rodríguez's remarkable accomplishment lies in fusing Aya's crisp portrait



Two detectives: Arévalo (left) and Gutiérrez



style with both a *noir*ish colour palette and a rich soundtrack blending the sinister stringed music of a mandolin with the ambient noise of animated fairgrounds and bars, cicadas and local wildlife, rippling waterways and ferry propellers—the latter used to sever the feet of one of the murdered women. The objects the locals carry with them—knives to gut fish, hunting guns, horticultural pliers and ropes to tie up boats—are also revealed as instruments of torture. *Marshland* encourages the viewer to scratch the surface and confront the unarticulated horrors that lie beneath.

Indeed, Rodríguez's edgy thriller chillingly interrogates the formation of Spain's postdictatorship culture. The detectives arrive in the wetlands on the very day Basque separatists have assassinated four off-duty civil guards on the outskirts of the town of Markina. Tensions are running high. The local mayor is keen to have the murders solved, as he is busy dealing with the consequences on the lucrative rice harvest of labourers striking in protest at substandard wages. Economic interests evidently override the importance of human lives. The local cacique (landowner) is a shadowy figure operating under the protection of the mayor, whose own approach is anything but transparent. "You don't know how things are done around here," he warns Pedro. The detective's answer reveals that he knows only too well that the situation here is mirrored across the rest of the country.

This is not the first time that Rodriguez has opted to go back to the 80s as a mode of reflecting on the fissures in Spain's democratic present

The shadow of the dictatorship hovers over the film from its very opening. Pedro is appalled to find in his hotel room a cross decorated with photographs of Franco and Hitler, and shoves it in a drawer. But out of sight isn't out of mind, and reminders are everywhere - such as the graffiti on the walls of an abandoned farmhouse spelling out 'Viva Franco' in large letters. The culture of institutional patronage and corruption thrives in Marshland, ominously underpinning the infrastructure of the fledgling democracy. Civil guards patrol the countryside, rifles slung over their shoulders, and it's suggested that they are involved in underhand activities, supporting the illegal drug trade and giving tip-offs to a local reporter that have implications for Juan and Pedro's investigation.

The locals too promote a cronyism that has devastating consequences for the community. Estrella and Carmen's father Rodrigo lies to the police about his daughters' movements in order to cover up his own theft of a kilo of heroin belonging to a local drug baron; he beats his wife and may even have abused his daughters. He is convinced that the detectives have been sent from Madrid only because his wife's brother undertook military service with a well-connected judge. In the Spain of Marshland, it's who you know that matters.

Franco may be dead, but the effects of Francoism are all too present. Poverty is rife: one man poaches illegally to make a living; a mother mentions that two of her children have emigrated to Germany and France (it's not clear whether this is economic flight or political exile), while the third has left for the Costa del Sol, servicing the lucrative tourist industry. When Pedro and Juan interview Estrella and Carmen's friends about the girls' disappearance, they all

talk of wanting to leave. One of them, Marina, bears the physical marks of maltreatment and is visibly shaken. The youth of the town are either implicated in the culture of violent misogyny and corruption, desperate to depart, drunken and depressed, scared out of their wits or dead.

Marshland initially positions Juan and Pedro as two contrasting visions of Spain. Gutiérrez characterises the former as a hardened pro, a boozing womaniser who opts for physical violence as a way of getting results. Arévalo's Pedro is cautious but also largely insensitive to the needs of the local community. Juan's experience serves the case well, but it has been forged in Franco's Gestapo, the Brigada Político-Social. When a reporter passes Pedro information suggesting that Juan was responsible for the death of a protester in 1971 and the torture of more than 100 individuals during the regime, he destroys the photographic evidence – a nod to the 'Pact of Silence' (also known as the 'Pact of Forgetting') that governed Spain's transition to democracy, a tacit agreement enshrined in the amnesty law of 15 October 1977. Pedro enacts a country's pragmatic decision to avoid retribution in favour of a compromised working relationship.

It is telling that Pedro has been punished with this remote posting for writing a letter to a newspaper criticising a military general's inflammatory remarks. Spain, Juan reminds Pedro, is a nation that isn't used to democracy, and the military still holds sway – Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Tejero's attempted coup will take place just a few months after the action depicted here. But the film refuses to adhere to easy binaries. Juan's surname is Robles, which translates as 'oaks', testifying to a noble strain in his character: loyalty to his partner. Pedro, meanwhile, is not averse to employing violence where he feels it is necessary. He is keen to differentiate himself from Juan, but the fact that their disagreements happen during shared activities - shooting at the fairground's rifle range, for example – suggests they may have more in common than Pedro is willing to admit. Indeed, the boundaries between criminality and legality are anything but clear in this powerful portrait of the fault lines of post-dictatorship Spain. §

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
José Antonio Félez
José Antonio Félez
José Sanchez Montes
Mercedes Cantero
Mikel Lejarza
Mercedes Gamero
Screenplay
Rafael Cobos
Alberto Rodríguez
Director of
Photography
Alex Catalán
Editing
José M.G. Moyano
Art Direction
Pepe Dominguez

delez Julio de La Rosa Montes ero Sound Mixer Daniel de Zayas Costumes Fernando García

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Conseieríja de Cultura

Executive Producer José Antonio Félez

Cast
Raúl Arévalo
Pedro Suárez
Javier Gutiérrez
Juan Robles
Antonio de La Torre
Rodrigo

Nerea Barros

Rocío

With financial support

from ICO - Instituto

de Crédito Oficial

Salva Reina
Jesús Castro
Joaquín Varela, 'Quini'
Manolo Solo
El Caso journalist
María Varod
Trinidad
Perico Cervantes
Trinidad's father
Jesús Ortiz
Andrés
Jesús Carroza
Miguel
Ana Tomeno

Manuel Salas Sebastián In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles

Distributor Altitude Film Entertainment

Spanish theatrical title **La isla mínima**

The Guadalquivir wetlands, Andalucía, 1980. Two policemen, Juan and Pedro, arrive from Madrid to investigate the disappearance of teenage sisters Estrella and Carmen, who were last seen near their hometown of Villafranco. The elder of the two detectives, Juan, is unwell, and his reputation for extortion and violence has aroused the suspicions of his younger colleague, who has more progressive views on policing. The pair meet with hostility from the girls' father, though their mother passes on some damaged negatives showing the girls posing topless with an unidentifiable man. Following the discovery of

the sisters' mutilated bodies, Pedro trades information with a local reporter in the hope of generating further leads. Juan and Pedro find a link between the murders and the disappearance of other women in the area. During a torrential downpour, Juan and Pedro close in on the killer, Sebastián, who has been helped by local gigolo Quini to lure girls to a hunting lodge with the promise of employment on the Costa del Sol. Juan kills Sebastián. Pedro discovers photographic evidence suggesting that Juan was responsible for the death of a protester in 1971. He destroys the image. Both men return to Madrid.

Me and Earl and the Dying Girl

USA 2015 Director: Alfonso Gomez-Rejon Certificate 12A 105m 7s

Reviewed by Graham Fuller

Laredo-born Alfonso Gomez-Rejon has followed his feature directorial debut, the layered meta-slasher movie The Town That *Dreaded Sundown* (released in the UK in April), with a drily humorous and psychologically penetrating high-school comedy-drama that augurs well for his future. Exuberantly stylish but never giddy or unctuous, sensitively scored by Brian Eno and Nico Muhly, Me and Earl and the Dying Girl presents a more trenchant mortality story than the breezy 50/50(2011), Michel Gondry's surreal Mood Indigo (2013) or the tear-jerking *The Fault in Our Stars* and *If I* Stay (both 2014); Gus Van Sant's Restless (2011) is more analogous. Harnessing Gomez-Rejon's cine-literacy, Me and Earl is additionally the first American teen movie to cite liberally, through visual touchstones, the influence of Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger.

Jesse Andrews's young adult source novel comprises the "stupid book" written by its 17-year-old protagonist Greg as a readmission letter to the University of Pittsburgh. First-time screenwriter Andrews's adaptation focuses on this as a coming-of-age story, though both novel and film stress the solipsism from which Greg must free himself. Self-conscious and self-loathing — to the extent that he's unaware of his likeability and coolness, which intrigue his dream girl Madison — Greg is pressed by his well-meaning mother to befriend fellow high-schooler Rachel, who is terminally ill. It's an experience that forces him to crack the carapace shielding him from other people's pain.

The placement of Earl's name in the title indicates his pivotal role as Greg's more emotionally intelligent friend, the one who makes him truly connect with Rachel. Enraged by his sustained denial of Rachel's imminent death, Earl literally knocks Greg's self-obsessiveness out of him, prompting him to take action by completing the avant-garde film (influenced by Warhol, Brakhage and Charles and Ray Eames) that he's been making for Rachel and that expresses his – brotherly rather than romantic or sexual – love. It has a more potent effect on her than the film received ambivalently by the novel's Rachel.

Gomez-Rejon and cinematographer Chunghoon Chung (Park Chan-wook's DP) artfully depict Greg's tunnel-vision perspective in a way that is expansive, using alarmingly fast dolly shots, fly-on-the-ceiling shots and, especially, wide-angle shots emphasising his mistaken belief that he is alienated. The wide images, which make Greg's regular experience of the tumult of the school canteen almost agoraphobia-inducing, may have been inspired by Dr Reeves's camera obscura views in A Matter of Life and Death (1946), serene though they are. That's a guess founded on the inclusion in Me and Earl of a clip from that Powell and Pressburger film, and the hint that the fire escape on which Greg and Rachel often talk is Greg's 'stairway to heaven'. It eventually leads him to Rachel's room, where he learns from the illustrated musings she has left behind how much their relationship meant to her – a magical scene built on six lines from the novel's final page.

The idea of outsiders Greg and Earl expressing



Terminal velocity: Olivia Cooke plays Rachel, 'the dying girl' of the title

themselves through their co-directing of irreverent-affectionate movie pastiches is analogous to the recreating (or 'sweding') of erased VHS tapes in Gondry's *Be Kind Rewind* (2007) and, curiously, the therapeutic staging of favourite films by the Angulo brothers in the documentary *The Wolfpack* [see page 64], like *Me and Earl* a Grand Jury prizewinner at this year's Sundance.

Whereas Greg and Earl's guiding auteur in the book is the Werner Herzog of *Aguirre*, *Wrath of God* (1972), Powell and Pressburger occupy that place in the film. Greg has a replica of the duo's production company the Archers' target

and Earl make — along with similarly off-colour tributes to films by, among others, Scorsese, Welles, Kubrick, Schlesinger, Truffaut, Godard, Roeg, Reed, Malle and Les Blank, all given mock Criterion Collection DVD covers — is called *Pooping Tom.* Gomez-Rejon was introduced to Powell and Pressburger by Martin Scorsese, for whom he worked as assistant; he thanks him here by showing a clip of the director talking about *The Tales of Hoffmann* (1951), and also includes inserts from Ian Christie and David Thompson's book *Scorsese on Scorsese* and Powell's *A Life in Movies*.

logo in his room, and the Powell spoof that Greg



R.J. Cyler as Earl and Thomas Mann as Greg



Cyler, Nick Offerman as Greg's Dad and Mann



as a ghost who haunts him, she proves he has a conscience, as the dying Rachel does with Greg.

One aspect of *Me and Earl* that gives pause is whether Rachel and Earl respectively fit the politically incorrect archetypes of the 'manic pixie dream girl' and 'magical negro' who traditionally help a neurotic white male protagonist to grow up and embrace his existence. With her wide-eyed stares and dimpled smiles, Olivia Cooke's Rachel would seem to embody physically the MPDG, yet the Oldham-born actress's performance makes no concession to cuteness or quirkiness; her apparent ordinariness makes the posthumous revelation that she was imaginatively creative all the more effective. Notwithstanding the poster on her bedroom wall of Hugh Jackman (who provides a fleeting cameo), it makes sense that she and Greg should bond.

A kid hardened by his poor, unhappy upbringing, the dyspeptic Earl is more of a caricature – an unsmiling junior Chris Rock – but R.J. Cyler individuates him, notably in the scenes where Earl reads Greg the riot act and delivers the most touching encomium to Rachel. Meanwhile, the wonderful Thomas Mann, though thinner and more handsome than the novel's Greg, is suitably pasty-faced and aghast as a youth illequipped to deal with the quotidian, let alone a friend's cruel premature death – no matter that a sequel would likely find him a happening writer-director of visually inventive bittersweet indie comedies. Texture is added by the nuanced acting of Connie Britton and Nick Offerman as Greg's pushy mother and eccentric hipster dad; of Molly Shannon as Rachel's tippling mom, whose effusiveness masks a bitter core; and of Jon Bernthal as Greg and Earl's macho history teacher - a kind of liberal Chuck Norris. 9

An aspect that gives pause is whether Rachel and Earl respectively fit the archetypes of the 'manic pixie dream girl' and 'magical negro'

If the visual references to Powell and Pressburger seem like an outpouring of fanboy enthusiasm, they are justified by Me and Earl's absorbing of the Archers' fatalistic approach to the deaths of young women, as seen in Black Narcissus (1947), The Red Shoes (1948) and Gone to Earth (1950). In losing the will to live and refusing further chemo treatment, Rachel essentially takes a death plunge like the heroines of those films. The Red Shoes and Gone to Earth particularly share Edgar Allan Poe's belief that "the death... of a beautiful woman is the most poetical topic in the world". Dying from cancer resists poeticisation, and Gomez-Rejon and Andrews creditably avoid the manipulativeness of Love Story (1970), Terms of Endearment (1983) or the more appealing The Fault in Our Stars on one hand, or the Powellian romanticisation of a woman's violent death on the other. Rachel's agonising demise is closer in spirit to that of the teenage leukaemia patient who humanises a self-indulgent rock musician in the little-seen 2014 indie Lullaby. Another parallel is the death from non-Hodgkin's lymphoma of an adolescent girl in David Cronenberg's Maps to the Stars (2014). Dying in hospital, she elicits the callousness of the bratty teen movie star who visits her as a publicity stunt;

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Steven Rales Dan Fogelman Jeremy Dawson Written by Jesse Andrews Based on his novel Director of Photography Chung-hoon Chung Edited by David Trachtenberg Production Designer Gerald Sullivan With Original Music by Brian Eno Featuring Music by Nico Mulhy Sound Mixer Pawel Wdowczak Costume Designer Jennifer Eve

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Pictures and Indian
Pictures and Indian
Paintbrush present
a Rhode Island
Ave. production
Executive Producer
Nora Skinner
Film Extracts
Les Quatre Cents
Coups/The 400
Blows (1959)
Tales of Hoffman A
Fantastic Opera (1951)
Taxi Driver (1976)

Glaze of Cathexis (1990)

Cast
Thomas Mann
Greg Gaines
Olivia Cooke
Rachel Kushner

Aguirre, der Zorn

Burden of Dream

(1982)

Gottes/Aguirre, Wrath of God (1972) Earl Jackson
Nick Offerman
Greg's dad
Molly Shannon
Rachel's morn
Jon Bernthal
Mr McCarthy
Connie Britton
Greg's morn
Matt Bennett
Scott Mayhew
Katherine Hughes
Madison

RJ Cyler

Masam Holden III Phil Bobb'e J. Thompson Derrick

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)

Greg Gaines narrates the story of his friendship with fellow Pittsburgh high-school senior Rachel Kushner.

He maintains anonymity at school by being amenable to every clique, while belonging to none. He and his African-American best friend Earl Jackson co-direct absurdist parodies of movies, especially arthouse classics.

After learning that Rachel has been diagnosed with leukaemia, Greg's mother insists that he befriend her. Rachel resents being pitied, but Greg makes her laugh and they gradually become close. Rachel is entranced by Greg and Earl's movies. Greg is perplexed by the sudden friendliness of Madison, his long-time crush. Rachel loses her hair after chemotherapy. Madison tasks Greg with making a film for Rachel. He and Earl tape their

classmates' insipid messages to her. When Rachel stops her chemotherapy, Greg's self-involved reaction angers her. Earl attacks Greg for his lack of empathy. Madison upbraids him for not completing Rachel's film, but invites him to the prom. However, on prom night he visits Rachel in hospital instead. He gives her a corsage and shows her the finished film – a poetic impression of the feelings she has inspired in him. She dies shortly afterwards.

Greg pays a shiva call to Rachel's home. In her room, he discovers a college recommendation letter that she wrote on his behalf, explaining why his grades have suffered. He is moved by her artworks, which shed light on her inner life and reveal how much their platonic love meant to her.



Young, gifted and status anxious: Ionely student Tracy (Lola Kirke, right) falls under the spell of self-styled It Girl Brooke (Greta Gerwig) in New York

Mistress America

USA/Brazil 2015 Director: Noah Baumbach Certificate 15 84m 9s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Having been rounded on for their hipster artisanal obsessions and their morally dubious creativity in his While We're Young (2014), the Millennials catch a break in Noah Baumbach's light, dextrous social comedy about the pleasures and perils of the New York college girl-crush. Both lonely freshman Tracy (Lola Kirke) and Brooke (Greta Gerwig), the thirtyish stepsister-to-be and self-styled It Girl who twirls her into an Instagram-cool Big Apple, vibrate sympathetically with the pressure of making their way in the world. Like the sweeter Frances Ha(2012, also co-written with Gerwig), to which it forms a skittish, screwball, complementary piece, Mistress America is on the side of the young, gifted and status-anxious. A movie about growing into (and out of) things - the city, friendships, creativity - it just can't forgo the opportunity to turn its satirical side-eye on them.

It's impossible, maybe even illegal, to make a comedy about artistic New York narcissists without invoking Woody Allen, a comparison that has dogged Baumbach for years. Yet Allen's shadow (specifically that life-into-fiction tale Deconstructing Harry, 1997) lies lightly here, as would-be writer Tracy transmutes Brooke's self-deluded glamour into a scathing short story. This time around, Baumbach's own take on the city is more jaded than the monochrome Manhattanstyle mooniness of Frances Ha. Tracy sees bonding with Brooke as "like being around New York City" – both are sharp, glittery, restless, the centre of happening things. But they're also flimsier and more changeable than their outward appearances suggest, as construction ravages Brooke's Times Square bolthole, and life her grandiose plans.

Especially acute is the film's skewering of how social media fuels this self-mythologising, with Brooke's tumble of epigrams, frantic nightlife and portfolio of barely-jobs ('inspirational' spin instructor, occasional interior designer, wannabe restaurateur) spun into a sheeny Google and Twitter fantasy ("I'll shorten that, punch it up and tweet it," is Tracy's reward for an insight). She's high on her own bullshit supply, and her seductive whirl sparks the intense female friendship that forms the film's core. Not the romantic, time-tested bond of Frances Ha (another thematic overlap) but a giddy infatuation spiked with authorial self-interest. Narrator Tracy watches Brooke cavorting on stage with an indie band, or pitching her half-baked restaurant idea to investors, with the avid interest that Nick Carraway brought to dissecting Gatsby. The nearly-sisters' wobbly, self-serving alliance also

replaces the traditional romance that would have anchored a more conventional film, and its jaundiced picture of female friendship is echoed in the 'women beware women' showdown between Brooke and her 'nemesis' and ex-best friend Mamie-Claire: "She stole my ideas and my fiancé, and then she *literally* stole my cats."

What's really fresh about Mistress America, however, is how its walking-and-talking New York naturalism transforms unexpectedly into a giddy, fast-talking Old Hollywood comedy of manners. Not that Baumbach is "making all this up" out of old motion pictures, as Bringing Up *Baby* once put it. The madcap third act – not so much a 'Lubitsch Touch' as a 'Baumbach Tweak' sees the director adapting his talky, angsty style to a classic house-party comedy interlude, as Brooke charges out to Connecticut to seek financing for her collapsing restaurant deal from wealthy ex-boyfriend Dylan and the hated Mamie-Claire. This isn't the 'Green World' Connecticut, the Shakespearean source of enlightenment and renewal that Stanley Cavell found in screwball comedies; reeking of money and the compromises of adulthood, it is a 21st-century hedge-funder's haven, a stultifying suburb where Brooke, Tracy and a pair of Tracy's friends throw gags and revelations about like stones in Dylan's sleek glass house. These cool, open-plan pastel spaces (in contrast to the warm thriftshopped NYC interiors) are used with nimble



What's really fresh is how its walking-and-talking New York naturalism transforms unexpectedly into a giddy, fast-talking Old Hollywood comedy of manners

incongruity for the pinballing comic dramas of the overlapping groups and pairs who variously plead, pitch, flirt, betray or reject one another.

Plot has been a later discovery for Baumbach. His early successes shunned it as a contrivance, preferring to limn novelistic portraits full of devastating little moments (2007's Margot at the Wedding is a prime example) which suggested, as a New Yorker profile noted, that his fate seemed to be "to pursue a literary career through the medium of film". Like his hero Rohmer, Baumbach preferred to extract drama from the talkative friction of his characters. Recently, however, he's been springing narrative surprises — While We're Young taking a dramatic turn into betrayal, Mistress America into neo-screwball.

So whether this sudden switch in tone and the deliberate staginess of the Connecticut interlude are an uproarious delight or an interesting misstep will depend on whether your taste runs to the melancholy, misanthropic Baumbach of *Greenberg* (2010) or the warmer Gerwig collaborations. There are some deliciously gawky grace notes, such as when Brooke makes her flaky finance pitch (including an exquisitely awkward 'rewind' mime), or when a chair-pyramid of disapproving readers puts Tracy's short story through the wringer.

Baumbach and Gerwig's dialogue doesn't prove quite such a neat fit, though. Classic screwball comedies rejoice in the exhilarating energy of rapid exchanges, that verbal tennis that's the USP of Hawks gems such as *His Girl Friday* (1940) or Sturges's sparkling satires. The difference in the fast-talking 2010s is that Brooke and Co lob smart, snarky, self-revelatory remarks at one another, sallies rather than rallies. A spiky blend of mean ("Your tragedy is your armour!" shouts a defiant Tracy at Brooke, about her mother's death) and dizzy ("I was the people that they make TV shows about"), the exchanges are at points as shrill as they are smirk-inducing.

Because the movie rattles past at a sharp clip (it's a lean 84 minutes), it pulls along a raft of ideas that, like Brooke's madcap schemes, aren't always followed through. Generational envy between the different tiers of youth and the nagging fear of having missed the boat are left hanging. A chewy examination of the ethics of fiction-writing fares best, and the film is streaked with the self-conscious narration from Tracy's story rebounding ironically back on her: "Meadow could see the whole world with painful accuracy, but not herself." Baumbach

has touched on the issues around throwing your nearest and dearest under the wheels of your fiction before, in *Margot at the Wedding* (and he himself put a version of his parents' divorce into *The Squid and the Whale*, 2005). Tracy doesn't have the opacity of the monstrous Margot, because Kirke, in a self-possessed, husky-voiced turn, lets you see the "splinter of ice in the heart" forming in the budding writer.

'Baby Tracy' may be the protagonist but Gerwig's lithe, loquacious Brooke, throwing off opinions like the sparks from a Catherine wheel, is the story's motor. The film fires up when she makes her entrance bobbing down the red steps on the Times Square ticket booth like a boho Margo Channing. An intrepid comedienne, Gerwig is unafraid to parade Brooke's irritating yet oddly attractive combination of pretension, glamour and self-involvement, a nod to her bossy, well-intentioned Violet in Whit Stillman's Damsels in Distress (2011). But Gerwig, who has an Irene Dunne-worthy facility for tempering the brittlest comedy with warmth, can also mine her character's depths with a look and a half-sentence. Watching her respond to a flirtatious "Whatever you're doing, it's working" is to be sideswiped by her sudden, silent revelation that absolutely nothing is. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Noah Baumbach Scott Rudin Lila Yacoub Rodrigo Teixeira Greta Gerwig Written by Noah Baumbach Greta Gerwig Director of Photography Sam Levy Edited by Jennifer Lame Production Designer Sam Lisenco Original Music Dean Wareham Britta Phillips Re-recording Mixer Paul Hsu Costume Designer Sarah Mae Burton

©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Mobius Literary, LLC and TSG Finance, LLC Production Companies Fox Serachlight Pictures presents in association with RT Features a Noah Baumbach picture Made in association with TSG Entertainment Executive Producers Lorenço Sant'Anna Sophie Mas

Cast Greta Gerwig Brooke Lola Kirke Tracy Matthew Shear Tony Cephas-Jones Nicolette Heather Lind Mamie-Claire Michael Chernus Dylan Cindy Cheung Karen Kathryn Erbe Tracy's mom Dean Wareham

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)

New York, present day. Lonely new student Tracy contacts Brooke, a thirtvish boho girl-about-town who is about to become her stepsister. Brooke is starting a restaurant, and Tracy is fascinated by her self-obsessed glamour, lifestyle and pronouncements. Tracy submits a scathing short story based on Brooke to her college's elite Mobius literary society, which has previously rejected her. Brooke's rich boyfriend dumps her, putting an end to the restaurant deal. Tracy persuades her college friend Tony and his jealous girlfriend Nicolette to drive her and Brooke to Connecticut, where they make an eventually successful pitch for the restaurant's financing to Brooke's wealthy exboyfriend Dylan and his wife Mamie-Claire. Brooke's father calls – the wedding to Tracy's mother is off. Dylan flirts with Brooke, and Tracy makes a play for Tony, who is arguing with Nicolette. Dylan offers Brooke money to not open the restaurant - Brooke refuses. Nicolette shows the group Tracy's story. They all denounce Tracy, and Brooke upbraids her. Tracy is alone in New York. The Mobius society admits her and publishes her story.

Tracy visits Brooke, who is packing up, moving to Los Angeles and applying to college. They make an uneasy truce, and have a Thanksgiving meal together in a café.



Learning curve: Tracy with college friend Tony (Matthew Shear)



No place like home: the Angulo brothers grew up sequestered in their Lower East Side apartment with only each other and movies for company

The Wolfpack

USA 2014 Director: Crystal Moselle

Reviewed by Michael Atkinson

Documentaries are a curious animal – they are naturally as subject as any other cinema to filmmaking personality and perspective, but at the same time their frisson and power are nearly always contingent upon their raw ingredients. The genre is, after all, a matter of witness, and sometimes just showing up with a camera at the right place, and rubbernecking with a little panache, is most of what's required. Nearly anyone with a camera, you could argue, might make a remarkable film out of Resistance veterans, or Werner Herzog in the jungle, or Holocaust survivors, or what have you. If there is an auctorial force at work, it's frequently in the form of the friendship, dedication and selfsacrifice demonstrated by the filmmaker off screen; often, a doc can, and must, be weighed as a craft of relationships, like espionage, with most of the real work done in private.

Certainly, the heart of Crystal Moselle's *The Wolfpack* is a freakishly remarkable thing – a family of six young brothers, products of a Peruvian father and a Midwestern mother, who grew up almost entirely sequestered in their cluttered Lower East Side apartment, hidden from the world. There's no reaching the bottom

of our fascination with the 'feral child' archetype whenever it appears – from Kaspar Hauser in the early 19th century to Samira Makhmalbaf's *The Apple* – in regards to both the end result of such abuse/neglect (particularly in popular myth, when a child is 'raised' by wild animals) and the unfathomable abuse itself. But Moselle's film is a modern – even postmodern – take on the paradigm: the six Angulo brothers are not feral, just home-schooled, sheltered from reality, heavily bonded as siblings and absurdly saturated in Hollywood movies, videos of which flowed into their home in a ceaseless stream.

They're also fabulously charming, with big relaxed smiles, serene dispositions and a zest for performance that puts them perfectly at ease in front of this stranger's camera. (The eldest, and seventh, sibling, a daughter with learning disabilities, is barely glimpsed.) Their plight is purely the father's engineering. Nominally a Hare Krishna follower and apparently some kind of monomaniac, Oscar Angulo wooed the pliant mother, Susanne, at Machu Picchu, and insisted that their subsequent children grow their hair waist-length and be given ancient Sanskrit names (Bhagavan, Govinda, Narayana, Mukunda, Krsna, Jagadisa and Visnu). Defensive, autocratic and bitter about modernity, Oscar decided that his children would have no intercourse with the world, and was the sole guardian of the apartment's key. The man's epic antipathy towards civilisation extends to his own habits - he considers work to be beneath him, and so

the family and their rent-controlled home are sustained solely by the municipal grants the city of New York send Susanne to support her home-schooling. Oscar eventually grants Moselle a few uncommunicative sit-downs, but the very fact of her presence is a thorn in his side with which he wearily struggles to make peace.

The Angulo brood, with their six sets of matching black warrior hair, first caught Moselle's eye during one of their rare visits to the sidewalk; filming thereafter took nearly five years. (Unfortunately, Moselle doesn't attempt to clarify for us the passing of time, or even to distinguish one brother from another.) However surprising her intimate access to the family is, given the decades of hermetic isolation that preceded it, her interloping makes perfect sense – the years of filming correspond with five of the six brothers entering into, struggling with or emerging from adolescence, and the bell-jar existence the family was leading was destined to shatter. The filmmaker's presence had to help, but the boys themselves began breaking the mould – the pivotal moment, off screen, was

Sometimes just showing up with a camera at the right place, and rubbernecking with a little panache, is most of what's required for a documentary



Reservoir togs: the film is a testament to movie love and shows how acculturated, against the odds, it's possible to become just by watching Hollywood films

when one of them exited the house without permission wearing a Michael Myers Halloween mask (the anonymity seemed like a good idea) and promptly got arrested, exposing the Angulos to municipal daylight and all manner of (sketchily outlined) bureaucratic interference.

Another peaking crisis, unfilmed but described by the brothers in hushed tones, was when a Swat team raided the house with a search warrant, looking for illegal weapons. But the police, after handcuffing everyone, found only the elaborate mock movie guns the brothers had lovingly crafted out of cardboard and duct tape – a perhaps fitting capper to the brothers' compulsive and passionate relationship with films, which they would transcribe into scripts and then, in full handmade regalia, re-enact. Moselle captures a handful of these movie remakes, and it's a shame there aren't more. At times *The Wolfpack* plunges into the movies-as-play dynamic of Zachary Oberzan's sublime Flooding with Love for the Kid (2007), in which the novel First Blood is recreated in a small Manhattan apartment with the director in every role, resembling nothing so much as a little kid scrambling across the floor acting out a tear-ass action-melodrama that's really only in his head. (Godard pioneered this childlike, stripped-down self-consciousness in his 1960s films.) Running up and down their hallway brandishing fake pistols, the Angulos are whole-hog cinephiles and cineastes and merry children all at once, living and breathing the let's-pretend essence of the medium.

Moselle very occasionally edges as well towards

the genre-morphing films-within-the-film of Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), capturing the Angulo sextet hitting the streets together in suits and sunglasses à la Reservoir Dogs, or filming one brother in his elaborate Batman suit brooding by the window in a moment right out of The Dark Knight (2008). (The Angulo patriarch wanted to shield his children from the horrors of the outside world, but obviously never thought twice about the films he brought them.) But it's underexplored terrain. The film remains a testament to movie love, and how acculturated, against all odds, you could become on a steady diet of Hollywood product. But in contrast to, say, Makhmalbaf's semi-fictional sleight of hand, Moselle largely misses the opportunity to see the Angulos' strange life through the looking glass of movies - to view their chilling societydeprivation experiment, and her exploration of it, as another form of cinema, as tainted by rampant movie-watching and recreating as Tarantino and Burton (and Godard), but lost in the funhouse without the solvent of irony.

Instead, Moselle seeks to normalise the boys, and *The Wolfpack* climaxes with a kind of earnest Hollywood ending, as the various brothers begin to break out of the cocoon, get jobs, meet people and tentatively enter the social whorl. (She takes them to their first movie theatre – to see *The Fighter* – as well their first public beach.) We may well guiltily resist her efforts – the Angulos' developmental Otherness, terribly odd to us and yet immersed in the pop culture we all know just

as well, is the film's primary allure. At the same time, the poignancy of what's undeniably on hand here – the bros' unspoken tribal cohesion, and the way their captivity pressurised and metastasised their creativity – is also fading, as they disperse and grow up. Things change, alas. §

Credits and Synopsis

Izabella Tzenkova Crystal Moselle Producers Hunter Gray Alex Orlovsky Camera Crystal Moselle Edited by Enat Sidi Music Danny Bensi Saunder Jurrians Aska Matsumiya Sound Recordists Richard Levengood Cole Wenner

Produced by

Project, LLC
Production
Companies
A Kotva Films
production
in association with
Verisimilitude
A film by Crystal
Moselle
Supported by TFI
Documentary Fund,
TFI/AAF Indiefilms
Storylab, The
Jerome Foundation,
Candescent Films
Executive

Tyler Brodie Louise Ingalls Sturges Cameron Brodie David Cross

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor Kaleidoscope Entertainment

A documentary in which filmmaker Crystal Moselle infiltrates the lives of the six Angulo brothers, aged from pre-teen to early twenties, who have grown up almost completely hidden from the outside world in a small apartment on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Home-schooled, the brothers have largely spent their lives watching and re-enacting movies, only being allowed outside occasionally. As the years of filming progress, the growing boys find small ways to rebel against their Peruvian father, and eventually begin to venture outside their home to interact with society.

Ant-Man

Director: Peyton Reed Certificate 12A 116m 56s

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The Marvel Cinematic Universe is the most tightly controlled and planned entity in the world of entertainment, perhaps just in the world, with several hundred superhero films scheduled well into the adolescence of your grandchildren, and plans in hand to cryogenically preserve Stan Lee's head so that he can make a cameo appearance in every last one of them.

This controlling streak has negative consequences, including films such as Avengers: Age of Ultron – overdetermined and overburdened with heroes and plotlines and the job of finding things for Hawkeye to do, so that character recedes into the background. Another negative consequence – or that's what it looked like – was the departure last year, shortly before shooting was due to start, of Ant-Man's original director Edgar Wright, who had spent eight years working with Joe Cornish on the script (the official reason was "differences in vision"). The upside of Marvel's anal retentiveness is the quality control. Wright's exit, along with a couple of uncertain trailers featuring nervous jokes about the feebleness of the name Ant-Man, raised the possibility that this would be the closest Marvel has come to a flop since Edward Norton played the Hulk in 2008; but while the finished film suffers from schmaltz and derivative plotting, it is sharp and engaging enough to get away with them.

Much of its appeal is generated by Paul Rudd as Scott Lang, an ex-con recruited by Henry Pym (Michael Douglas), the original Ant-Man, to take over his role. Rudd's likeable wariness and deflating wit make the absurdity of an ant-sized superhero, among other absurdities, easier to swallow. He gets strong support from Evangeline Lilly, who makes Pym's daughter Hope cynical, tough, smart and attractive: it's a shame the script leaves her character overshadowed by the men in her life, her father and her boss, the villainous



Antastic voyage: Paul Rudd

Darren Cross (Corey Stoll – dynamic, but he can't push the character, a psycho-industrialist with militaristic leanings, beyond stereotype). Michael Peña sacrifices dignity as Scott's comic Latino cellmate, but is rewarded with a couple of heroic punches and the film's two funniest moments.

Plotting is nugatory (standard three-act structure – recruitment, training, heist) and the inevitable MCU-cementing encounter with an Avenger feels forced (and the Falcon? They couldn't get a proper Avenger?). A subplot about Scott's relationship with his young daughter is offputtingly sentimental. Hefty contradictions remain unresolved: as Ant-Man, Scott punches with the mass of a full-grown adult, yet is light enough to ride a flying ant; and is he an idealist who committed a one-off whistle-blowing burglary or an expert thief who knows his way around alarms and safes? Still, the fights are well choreographed and for once not overlong, and the shrinking sequences are intermittently brilliant; visual and rhetorical echoes of The Incredible Shrinking Man (1957) are presumably deliberate. Ant-Man is no masterpiece, but it is a plausible addition to the Marvel universe and a smart summer action comedy in its own right. 9

Buttercup Bill

Directors: Émilie Richard-Froozan, Rémy Bennett Certificate: not submitted 95m

Reviewed by Kelli Weston

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist *Buttercup Bill* opens with a shot of a little blonde girl running through a field in a mud-splattered white dress. This girl haunts the film even more than the titular character, a mute young boy in a cowboy hat, an imaginary playmate who proves a far more sinister emblem.

The film (shot over just 16 days) concerns the twisted bond between former childhood companions Pernilla and Patrick, estranged for years until a mutual friend's suicide brings them back together. Pernilla finds the brooding Patrick deep in the Louisiana backwoods, where, much to her chagrin, he spends his time reflecting on redemption and God. But despite Patrick's newfound interest in religion, their relationship, at once playful, possessive and blatantly manipulative, resumes almost as if they had never separated. Soon Pernilla has moved in with Patrick, and their aimless days are spent dancing, play-fighting and luring others into sexual exploits that seem especially designed to humiliate the third party.

For all the apparent intimacy between the two, there is an unseen barrier between them, which Pernilla is more desperate to break down than Patrick. Conversations hint at long-buried secrets, which finally flood forth when at last Patrick blames them both for their friend Flora's suicide. We learn that as children Patrick and Pernilla lured Flora into the woods to play 'Buttercup Bill' and there Patrick raped her while Pernilla watched. The film's tragedy seems to be that because of this, says Patrick, the two can never really be 'together' – even though nothing in the final scenes suggests they will unhook themselves from each other any time soon.

Rémy Bennett (granddaughter of music legend Tony Bennett) co-wrote and co-directed *Buttercup Bill* with Emilie Richard-Froozan, and also plays Pernilla to Evan Louison's Patrick. Even if it ultimately falls short as a convincing tale, Bennett and Froozan's film makes several interesting choices, especially in its use of the female gaze: in a glaring departure from standard cinematic sex-scene practice, for example, they position Pernilla as the spectator — and there is something both powerful and passive about this decision.

Buttercup Bill makes ample if not always authentic use of its rural southern location, though for a film set in Louisiana it is significantly populated by blonde characters, often in white clothing, in service of an aesthetic goal that remains elusive. The film is more often concerned with its look than its storytelling: for instance, at one point Patrick and Pernilla visit a field of rusted, abandoned furniture, stoves and metal parts, all scribbled in large lettering with messages about the rapture and Jesus. Though the religious elements are woven into the plot by a heavy hand throughout, this scene seems placed purely to provoke another conversation about redemption – with dialogue that feels stilted, delivered awkwardly by both actors. Overall the performances of Bennett and especially Louison are solid, although some moments feel too contrived to produce intense bursts of emotion.

That said, *Buttercup Bill*'s stylistic elements regularly surpass the effectiveness of its plot.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Kevin Feige
Screenplay
Edgar Wright
Joe Cornish
Adam McKay
Paul Rudd
Story
Edgar Wright
Joe Cornish
Director of
Photography
Russell Carpenter
Editors
Dan Lebental
Colby Parker Jr
Production Designer

Shepherd Frankel Music
Christophe Beck
Production
Sound Mixer
Whit Norris
Costume Designer
Sammy Sheldon
Differ
Visual Effects
and Animation
Industrial Light
& Magic
Method Studios
Visual Effects

Lola VFX Cinesite Trixter Capital T **Stunt Co-ordinator** Jeff Habberstad

Production Company Marvel Studios presents Executive Producers Louis D'Esposito Alan Fine Victoria Alonso Michael Grillo Stan Lee Cast
Paul Rudd
Scott Lang, 'Ant-Man'
Evangeline Lilly
Hope van Dyne
Corey Stoll
Darren Cross,
"Yellowjacket"
Bobby Cannavale
Paxton
Michael Peña

Luis Tip 'T.I.' Harris

Edgar Wright

Maggie
David Dastmalchian
Kurt
Michael Douglas
Dr Henry Pym, 'Hank'
Abby Ryder Forston
Cassie
Martin Donovan
Mitchell Carson
John Slattery
Howard Stark
Anthony Mackie
Sam Wilson,
'The Falcon'

Wood Harris

Judy Greer

Gale

Dolby Digital/ Dolby Atmos In Colour [1.85:1] Some screenin

Some screenings presented in 3D

Distributor Buena Vista International (UK)

US, 1989. Scientist Henry Pym angrily confronts industrialist Howard Stark and S.H.I.E.L.D. official Mitchell Carson over their attempts to use 'Pym particles' for military purposes.

Double Negative

Luma Pictures

San Francisco, present day. Burglar Scott Lang, newly released from prison, breaks into Pym's house and finds a leathery suit with helmet. It emerges that Pym has set up the burglary, hoping Lang will take the suit, which Pym wore years earlier as little-known superhero Ant-Man – it allows the wearer to shrink to the size of an ant (thanks to Pym particles), while retaining full-size mass and strength. Darren Cross, Pym's former protégé, is conducting experiments with Pym particles to create an army of miniaturised soldiers in weaponised armour ("Yellowjackets"). Rescued by

Pym from a police cell, Scott reluctantly agrees to help stop Cross. Pym and his daughter Hope, who is also Cross's assistant, train Scott to use the suit. Scott encounters and fights Avengers member the Falcon. With Hope and some criminal friends, Scott breaks into Cross's HQ, disrupting the sale of Yellowjacket technology to Carson, who now represents criminal organisation Hydra. A maddened Cross, wearing Yellowjacket armour, goes to the home of Scott's estranged wife and seizes Scott's young daughter. To defeat him, Scott shrinks further, passing between the molecules of the Yellowjacket suit. He continues to shrink, descending into the quantum realm – the process that killed Pym's wife years earlier. Scott survives, however, and is apparently invited to join the Avengers.

Cartel Land

USA 2015

Director: Matthew Heineman



Our little secret: Rémy Bennett, Evan Louison

One of its strengths is (perhaps unsurprisingly, given Bennett's lineage) its soundtrack, mainly comprising vintage jazz, R&B and gospel (including Washington Phillips), all of which add to the nostalgic southern tone. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Emma Comley Sadie Frost Written by Émilie Richard Fronzan Rémy Bennett Director of **Photography** Ryan Foregg Vanessa Roworth Production **Designer** Akin McKenzie Music Will Bates Sound Mixer James Eck Rippie Costume Design Veronica Foregge Rémy Bennett

Production Company A Blonde to Black picture

Executive **Producers** Andrew Green Ren White

Cast

Pernilla

Joey

Vincent

Mandy

Olivia

Jasper

Mena

Fyan Louison

Pauly Lingerfelt

Monroe Roberstor

Jaime Wallace

Becca Gerroll

James Conca

Mallory June

Alexis Horton

voung Pernilla or Mire young Patrick

[1.78:1] Rémy Bennett

Trinity Filmed Entertainment

Katie Belle

young Flora
Reid Meado

Buttercup Bill

Not submitted for theatrical classification Video certificate: 18 Running time: 95m 29s

Louisiana, present day. Following the suicide of childhood playmate Flora, Pernilla seeks out Patrick, another childhood friend, with whom she shares a strong emotional attachment. After years of estrangement, Pernilla and Patrick reunite, and Pernilla immediately moves in with him. They resume a relationship of emotional manipulation and sex games that often include the unwilling participation of another person. In the time they have been separated, Patrick has turned to religion and he desperately hopes for redemption, much to Pernilla's chagrin. Pernilla and Patrick share a dark secret that threatens to destroy their close bond: years ago, Patrick raped Flora while Pernilla watched, Patrick tells Pernilla that, because of this, they can never be together.



Walk the borderline: Cartel Land

Reviewed by Rachel Rakes

The structural organisation of Cartel Land, a documentary directed by Matthew Heineman, at once resembles a typical profile doc and a typical action film. The primary story arc has been crafted comfortably into a hero/downfall progression, and scenes are played for maximum emotional impact and breathless thrill. Shot in 'Scope with an ultra-professional score and impressive in-the-middle-of-war camerawork, the film is made up of moments that could easily be

transported into a fictionalised version of itself.

Cartel Land opens and closes in a meth lab in Michoacán, Mexico. In the prologue, the workers explain that all the drugs they're making are intended for consumption in the US, where demand is the highest, and that they've perfected their production methods after receiving training from American chemists. That scene soon dissolves into the central matter of the film: a comparison between a vigilante group



Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Matthew Heineman Tom Yellin Arizona storvline inspired by Damon Tabor's Rolling Stone article Border of Madness Filmed by Matthew Heineman

Cinematography

Matthew Heineman

Matt Porwoll Edited by Matthew Hamachek Matthew Heineman Bradley J. Ross Pax Wassermann H. Scott Salinas Jackson Greenberg Sound US Unit

Andres Arias

A documentary following two different vigilante

groups waging war against Mexican drug cartels.

In the Mexican state of Michoacán, Dr José Mireles

leads a citizen coalition, the Autodefensas, against

the violent Knights Templar drug cartel, while

Glenn Micallef Peter Miller Mexico Unit Andres Arias Myles Estey Matt Porwoll

©A&E Television Networks, LLC Production

A&E Indiefilms presents an Our Time Projects and Documentary Group production in association with Whitewater Films A film by Matthew Supported by a grant from the Sundance Institute Documentary Film Program with additional support from the Sundance Institute Catalyst Iniative Executive Producers Molly Thompson David McKillop Robert Debitetto

Distributor

in the US, army veteran Tim Foley heads a small paramilitary group called Arizona Border Recon. The Autodefensas movement successfully purges cartel operatives from several villages but the group is eventually infiltrated by the drug gangs.

In Colour

Closed Curtain

Iran 2013

Directors: Jafar Panahi, Kambozia Partovi

fighting cartels in Mexico and a vigilante group in the US trying to stop the 'bad guys' crossing the border. Though it's detached narratively from the rest of the film, it's worth keeping that opening scene in mind throughout, as it's the one thing that ties these two groups and their stories together. The cartels—at least in the incomprehensibly powerful position they've ascended to—would not exist without the illegal drugs trade to the US, where many local forces are complicit, just as they are in Mexico.

In an initial monologue, spoken over an aerial shot of the wall along the Mexican border, Tim 'Nailer' Foley, American vigilante and leader of Arizona Border Recon, remarks on the "imaginary line between good and evil". His paramilitary group, fighting to keep the cartels out of the US, is on the side of good, he believes. Made up of a variety of men with many different ideological motivations, his group patrols the border by night, taking a one-by-one approach to halting the cartels' movements. It's a myopic and short-term method, but one that satisfies their impulse to protect the immediate area when the federal government fails to do so.

Scenes with Foley's group recur occasionally to offset the film's main event – the story of the Autodefensas citizens' defence group in Michoacán. After a spate of ruthless killings in their village, the Autodefensas develop a strategy of moving from town to town with a stockpile of weapons to purge the murderous Knights Templar cartel, which controls not just the drugs trade but also major agricultural produce including avocados and limes, and acts as tax collector and informal sub-dictatorship in several parts of the state. Led by small-town physician José Mireles, the group starts with a series of successful surprise attacks on Templar thugs and guards, and gains new recruits in each town it comes to. But the narrative slowly reveals the unheroic side of the Autodefensas heroes: along the way there are run-ins with the police and army (known for being rife with corruption but still respected as the only tie to order that many of these people have). As their confidence is bolstered by their victories, they begin to harass the very people they are meant to protect; over time they are infiltrated by the cartel itself, and eventually absorbed into the state policing apparatus. In certain scenes, the Autodefensas are clearly playing to the camera, adding a little extra hit on the head here or a pained verbal confrontation there. As a result there are moments that resemble a realtime *The Act of Killing*, with the Autodefensas acting out their heroism as it happens.

Cartel Land is problematically framed as an unlikely comparison between the ADR and the Autodefensas. The latter came into their short-term campaign with their eyes open to the institutional ineffectuality around them (Mexican drug lord El Chapo Guzman recently re-escaped from prison with the ease of someone who has control over every layer of the justice system). The ADR, as they are portrayed here, fail to see the complicity in their own government, and in the system itself. They're a militia blind to half of what they're fighting. It's difficult to see what's gained in placing these two groups side by side. §

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

Since 2010, when he was sentenced to six years in prison, banned from making films for 20 years and placed under house arrest, the Iranian director Jafar Panahi has been a revered living example of both active artist censorship and dignified rebellion against it. His This Is Not a Film (2011) was a response to his situation at once formally sophisticated and emotionally raw: a work that questioned the very terminology whereby art can be classified or forbidden, and that paid homage to the selfreferentiality and ambiguous social critique of Iran's post-revolutionary cinema even as it foregrounded the apparent ineffectuality of that celebrated movement in preserving a safe space for artistic expression. That work was smuggled out of Iran on a USB stick hidden in a cake, and justly celebrated worldwide.

This follow-up sees Panahi still living largely in isolation. In one of the film's many blurred certainties, he does seem able to leave his home, and certainly receives a lot of visitors — but his ability to express himself remains a legally restricted matter, and the impact on his mental state and creative capacities is clear. If Virginia Woolf deemed solitude — the ability to "escape a little from the common sitting-room" and occupy instead "a room of one's own" — indispensable to the nurturing of a creative sensibility, Panahi here becomes the chronicler of its destructive potential.

Matters commence confidently, with a fictionalised version of Panahi's situation becoming a politicised home-invasion thriller. A writer, played by Panahi's regular collaborator Kambozia Partovi, is in hiding after clashing with the authorities over his keeping of pet dogs, which are banned in Iran. His isolation is disturbed, however, by the arrival of a mysterious brother and sister, who claim to be on the run; the brother (Hadi Saeedi) takes off again, leaving the woman (Maryam Moghadam), and a warning that she may attempt suicide. A tetchy relationship develops... but just as it's getting interesting, the real Jafar Panahi wanders in, as if he's lost faith in the whole idea of allegorising or dramatising his ordeal, and the narrative becomes a tired and tiring exercise in self-deconstruction. The woman



Set apart: Kambozia Partovi

becomes a figment, and a singularly incoherent symbol of many things at once: muse and feisty challenger of complacency; personification of writer's block; external manifestation of suicidal impulses. The writer disappears for a while, to resurface as another voice in his head. Previous scenes from the film are replayed with the crew and cameras visible. The woman appears to kill herself, but keeps reappearing.

It's partly a Godardian exposé of the pointlessness of artifice, partly a sorrowful gesture of creative indifference and partly an artsy version of one of those horror movies in which all the characters turn out to be elements of the same troubled consciousness. Only some moments – largely involving interaction between the writer and his contraband dog, Boy – shine through the general murk of a film whose very ineffectiveness might make its most important point, which is that a great artist is being damaged, his light dimmed, his very will to make things weakened. "There is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind," was Woolf's claim in A Room of One's Own. The state of disillusionment and creative self-sabotage evidenced here speak otherwise. This might make it one of the most important bad films ever made. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Jafar Panahi
Screenwriter
Jafar Panahi
Writer's dialogues
with the girl and
her brother
Kambozia Partovi
Director of
Photography
Mohamad Reza
Jahanpanah
Edit
Jafar Panahi
Sound
Javad Emami
Executive Manager

Hadi Saeedi

Cast Kambozia Partovi writer Maryam Moghadam Melika Jafar Panahi Hadi Saeedi Reza, Melika's brother Azade Torabi Melika's sister Abolghasem Agha Olia Ramin Akharia Sina Mashyekhi Mahar Jafaripour Melika's younger brothe Siamak Abedinnou worker Zeynab Khanoom herself Boy

Boy

In Colour [1.85:1] Subtitles

Distributor New Wave Films

Persian/Farsi theatrical title Pardé Iran, the present. A writer smuggles his dog into his home, shaves his head and covers all his windows. A young couple interrupt his isolation, claiming to be on the run; the man leaves, warning as he goes that the woman may attempt suicide. She reveals that she has worked for the government, and has information about the writer's past and the reasons for his self-imposed isolation. She tears down the curtains, and uncovers framed posters for Jafar Panahi's films. The writer and young woman continue to bicker, appearing and reappearing as characters, while the real Jafar Panahi joins the story. There is a break-in; Panahi persuades his landlord to repair the broken window without reporting it. The young woman walks into the sea, inviting Panahi to follow her. A second woman arrives, seeking her sister and brother; Panahi denies all knowledge of the couple. He watches recordings made on his phone by the writer earlier in the film. He pictures himself walking into the sea. His landlord's wife visits with a gift of food. He packs and leaves the house.

The Cobbler

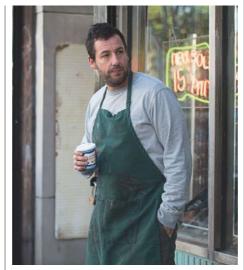
USA 2014 Director: Tom McCarthy Certificate 12A 97m 49s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Appearing in theatres with almost the same frequency as 'a Woody Allen movie', the 'Adam Sandler movie', in the 20 years of its existence, has been similarly unchanging. (The Sandler formula might be a little less artful but has probably generated more and louder laughter than Allen's during the same period.) In this variation, Sandler plays Max Simkin, a schlubby, depressed, fourth-generation cobbler running his family's business on Manhattan's Lower East Side. Rather than begrudging the hyper-gentrification that threatens to push him out, he almost welcomes it as a way out of the drudgery: he's broke, lives at home with his dementia-suffering mother and is still wounded by his father's sudden disappearance years ago. While this emotional underpinning has potential, it is played with far too heavy a hand, and seeps into moments that would've been better served by comedy.

After his stitching machine breaks down, Max retrieves from the basement the one that belonged to his great-great-grandfather (which, in a prologue reminiscent of A Serious Man, is said to be a gift from an angel) and soon finds that, by putting on any shoes he repairs with it, he can magically transform into their owners. Soon Max is getting his groove back by performing a series of not-so-lighthearted pranks – dining and dashing disguised as a black man, stealing a rich man's shoes and driving his sports car disguised as a black man and, in the film's most successful/least problematic comedic sequence, trying to get laid while wearing the boots of his handsome DJ neighbour (Dan Stevens). But because this is an Adam Sandler film, Max is also really, really good to his mother – so good in fact that he puts on a pair of his father's shoes and has a nice dinner date with her. (You don't see them kissing on the mouth or anything but... maybe mom should've gone into a home instead.)

Things get even more outlandish when Max decides to teach woman-beating gang leader Leon (Method Man) a lesson and becomes embroiled in a real-estate mogul's attempt



Stepping out: Adam Sandler

to whack the lone holdout in a building she wants to knock down for condos. This action-heavy second half is not only tacked on, but contains a lot of not-so-subtle moments of racism, occasionally played for lazy laughs. Although the beautiful, tough-as-nails community organiser Max falls for is Latina, the vast majority of characters of colour are thugs or, while embodied by Max, engage in thuggish behaviour; Max's decision to disguise himself as a cross-dresser with giant, impractical high heels isn't terribly funny or PC either. Yet all of this is trumped by the stupidity of the happy ending, a twist that would be too dopey even for a children's film.

The Cobbler can't manage the real-world details either — for a film set amid the battle between New York's gritty artistic past and shiny, antiseptic future, there's a lack of reverence for the spaces that define the Lower East Side. (The film's fakakta faux klezmer soundtrack echoes this hollow engagement.) Sandler fans and believers in the humanising touch of director/co-writer Tom McCarthy (The Station Agent, The Visitor) will be left equally disappointed. §

The Confessions of Thomas Ouick

United Kingdom/Sweden 2015 Director: Brian Hill, Certificate 15 93m 43s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In order to maintain ambiguity until the crucial moment when soi-disant serial killer Thomas Quick recants his confessions and resumes his birth name of Sture Bergwall, Brian Hill's careful, chilling documentary eliminates the contentious debate about Bergwall's guilt that raged in Sweden during the period when he was owning up to seemingly every unsolved murder committed in Scandinavia over a period of ten years. Also omitted is the crucial fact that, while on day release in the early 1990s, Bergwall spent time in libraries going through microfiche newspapers for suitable crimes to which he might lay claim.

Nevertheless, as with the tonally similar documentary The Imposter (2012), it's a given that we realise very early on that the bearded, balding, sad-eyed old gent in a woolly jumper recounting his life story isn't really 'the Swedish Hannibal Lecter'. Henry Lee Lucas, inspiration for John McNaughton's Henry Portrait of a Serial Killer (1986), is also now thought to be a serial confessor - though it seems likely he did commit at least some of the crimes he linked himself to. Lucas similarly gained a largerthan-life monstrous reputation through the expedient of confessing to such a wide range of murders (of men, women and children, with attendant perversions) that anyone who could commit all of them must be classed as polymorphously homicidal to a fantastic degree.

Of course, we're inclined to sympathise with young Sture – a gay man from a repressive rural family, with a history of drug abuse and self-harm; and the older Sture shows a certain regret for the further torment suffered by the relatives of his now-disowned victims, whose murders are again unsolved. But Hill carefully undercuts this with an interview with one of Bergwall's long-ago gay-bar pick-ups, who barely survived an unmotivated stabbing that seems very much like the early fumble of an aspiring serial killer. Among the dramatised passages is a Nordic-noir-style recreation of the crime for which Bergwall was unambiguously convicted, a sadistic yet bungled home invasion. Those involved in investigating this crime stress that Bergwall, who now projects dazed gentleness, was exceptionally aggressive and needlessly violent before he discovered that apparent candour on the therapist's couch was a more reliable way of securing drugs (and someone to talk to) than armed robbery.

The case raises a great many issues, and Hill tries to be balanced in explaining the curiously trusting, minimally punitive regime of the Säter clinic, where Bergwall was



Claim to infamy: Sture Bergwall

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Mary Jane Skalski
Tom McCarthy
Written by
Tom McCarthy
Paul Sado
Director of
Photography
Mott Hupfel
Editor
Tom McArdle
Production Designe
Stephen Carter
Music

John Debney Nick Urata **Sound Mixer** Damian Canelos **Costume Designer** Melisa Toth

©Cobbler Nevada, LLC **Production Companies** Voltage Pictures presents a Next Wednesday, Golder Spike, Voltage production Filmed with the support of the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development Executive Producers Nicholas Chartier Zev Foreman Michael Bederman

Cast
Adam Sandler
Max Simkin
Cliff 'Method
Man' Smith
Leon Ludlow
Ellen Barkin
Elaine Greenawalt
Melonie Diaz
Carmen Herrara
Dan Stevens
Emiliano
Fritz Weaver
Mr Solomon

Yul Vazquez
Marsha
Steve Buscemi
Jimmy
Dustin Hoffman
Abraham Simkin
Lynn Cohen
Sarah Simkin
Dascha Polanco
Macy
Craig Walker
Danny Donals
Joey Slotnick

Kevin Breznahan
Patrick

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor Kaleidoscope Film Distribution

New York City, present day. Cobbler Max Simkin is mending a pair of shoes when his stitching machine breaks down, so instead he uses an old machine that belonged to his great-great-grandfather. While waiting for the customer, Leon, to collect the shoes, Max tries them on and magically takes on Leon's appearance. He tests this out with other shoes, experimenting with being other people. Max decides to get revenge on the woman-beating Leon but his

plan goes awry. He discovers that Mrs Greenawalt, a wealthy real-estate developer, wants to kill an elderly tenant who's refusing to move out of an old building that she wants to turn into condos. Max tricks Mrs Greenawalt into admitting her murderous plans on live television. The barber next door to Max reveals that he's his long-disappeared father who's been hiding from the mob. The two ride off together in Max's father's chauffeured limousine.

The Diary of a Teenage Girl

USA 2014
Director: Marielle Heller
Certificate 18 102m 1s

incarcerated, and stressing the eminence of the late doctor who was his primary psychoanalyst. The film doesn't get into the now obvious drawbacks of 'recovered memory therapy', even when Bergwall delivers an unverifiable grand-guignol fantasy to serve as his Hitchcock-style psychopath origin story (some details of Quick's tale of sibling cannibalism seem to have been picked up by Thomas Harris and added into the Hannibal Lecter backstory set out in the novels *Hannibal* and *Hannibal Rising* and their film and TV adaptations).

In the end, there's a sense that, for all his persuasive presence and sincere apologies, Bergwall-Quick is now addressing the media — he originally 'came out' as a fake confessor in a 2008 TV interview—in exactly the same wheedling, selling-a-legend manner that he used on the legal and psychiatric authorities. A final caption, citing an investigator who refused to be interviewed for the film, revives the possibility that he still might not have told his real story. §

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Katie Bailiff Inspired by original research by Hannes Rastam and his book Thomas Quick - the Making of a Serial Killer and by the further research of Dan Josefson and his book The Strange Case of Thomas Quick: The Swedish Serial Killer and the Psychoanalyst Who Created Him Director of **Photography** Roger Chapman Editor Mags Arnold Music Nainita Desai Malcolm Laws Sound Recordists Anders Hultberg lan Maclagan Tony Meering

Georg Schroeter

Drama Sequences
Art Director
Erika Von
Weissenberg
Sound
Niklas Merits

Niklas Merits Christian Holm Costume Designer Anna-Karin Cameron

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support of the

A Brian Hill film

Executive Producers Sam Lavender Anna Miralis

Cast
Oskar Thunberg
Sture Bergwall/
Thomas Quick
Erik Lennblad
younger Sture
Leo Sigelius
Sture as a child
Vanja Nilsson
Birgitta Stahle
Jonas Hudlund
Seppo Penttinen
Johan Carlberg
Lennart Hoglund

In Colour [1.85:1] Part-subtitled

Distributor
Picturehouse
Entertainment

A documentary about Sture Bergwall. In 1990, Swedish drug addict Bergwall - who had decided to use the name Thomas Quick - attempted, with an accomplice, to rob a bank by invading the home of the manager and threatening the man's family. Committed to the Säter clinic in northern Sweden, Bergwall settled into institutional life, receiving psychotherapy and medication. Three years later, during therapy, he claimed to be the murderer of 11-year-old Johan Asplund, who disappeared in 1980. Though he was unable to show the authorities where the body was, Bergwall was convicted of the crime. Over the next decade, he confessed to 38 more unsolved murders, claiming victims in various Scandinavian countries and admitting to a variety of crimes including cannibalism and necrophilia. In analysis, he claimed to recover the memory of his parents forcing him to eat part of his stillborn brother - supposedly the incident that sparked his homicidal mania. In 2001, he abandoned his Quick identity and stopped talking to the police, claiming to have made up all the confessions in order to get attention and drugs. Though there continues to be controversy about his involvement in many crimes. Bergwall was released after 23 years' incarceration.



On the cusp: Bel Powley

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Minnie, the 15-year-old protagonist of Marielle Heller's first feature, finger-paints a bloody 'X' on the thigh of the man to whom she has just lost her virginity. It's the watershed she's been thirsting for, and she marks the occasion with a Polaroid so that she can see the change she imagines etched on her very visage. *The Diary of a Teenage Girl* should similarly score an emphatic 'X' on the career maps of both Heller and her lead actress Bel Powley, heralding for the former a long future in filmmaking and for the latter the full, deserved attention of Hollywood casting directors.

Adapted by Heller from Phoebe Gloeckner's 'words and pictures' novel, the film benefits tremendously from having the relatively unknown British actress Powley in the lead, avoiding those issues of identification that a branded performer can bring. Powley's large eyes express her character's grab-what-you-can élan – Minnie is a talented cartoonist in the

style of comic-book artist Aline Kominsky-Crumb, and her drawings (animated here by Sara Gunnarsdottir) jet into the live-action frame, giving colour to the umber interiors of the film's mid-70s San Francisco setting. Paying no mind to the crises of Holden Caulfield in the classroom nor to the trial of Patty Hearst reported on TV, Minnie prefers the world of her creative imagination and the privacy of her flock-wallpapered bedroom where, under a pin-up of Iggy Pop, she confides to a portable tape-recorder the spoken-word diary of the title.

Minnie's embarking on a sexual relationship with her mother's boyfriend Monroe is the meatand-potatoes of this audio memoir, which is both deictic ("It happened like this") and vocative ("You touched my tit") and makes a lively change from the retrospective, clear-eyed, dead-coals narration of the more conventional coming-of-age drama. Consistently, in fact, Heller's film bursts out of the *Bildungsroman* genre. Where other films —

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Anne Carey
Bert Hamelinck
Madeline Samit
Miranda Bailey
Written for the
Screen by
Marielle Heller
based on the novel by
Phoebe Gloeckner
Director of
Photography
Brandon Trost
Editors
Marie-Hélène Dozo
Kore-Hélène Dozo
Timmerman
Production Designer

Jonah Markowitz Original Score Nate Heller Sound Mixer Bob Gitzen Costume Designer Carmen Grande Animation Sara Gunnarsdottir

Production Companies Caviar and Cold Iron Pictures present a Caviar/Cold Iron Pictures, Archer Gray production With support from Cinereach Supported by the Sundance Institute Feature Film Program Additional support from the Sundance Institute's Lynn Auerbach Screenwriting Fellowship, the Sundance Institute Maryland Film Fellowship Completed with the support of Women

Make Movies, Inc

Amy Nauiokas

Cast
Bel Powley
Minnie Goetz
Alexander Skarsgård
Monroe
Kristen Wiig
Charlotte

Made possible by

the New York State

Council on the Arts

Michael Sagol

Amanda Marshall

Executive Producers

Christopher Meloni Pascal Abigail Wait Gretel Miranda Bailey Andrea Carson Mell Michael Cocaine John Parsons Burt Madeleine Waters Kimmie

Burt
Madeleine Waters
Kimmie
Austin Lyon
Ricky Wasserman
Quinn Nagle
Chuck
Davy Clements

Anthony Williams Frankie Margarita Levieva Tabatha

[2.35:1] Distributor

Vertigo Films

San Francisco, 1976. Fifteen-year-old cartoonist Minnie keeps a tape-recorded diary. She loses her virginity to her mother Charlotte's 35-year-old boyfriend Monroe and they continue to sleep together. When Monroe proposes that they end their relationship, Minnie embarks on a campaign of sexual exploration with, among others, a classmate and strangers in bars. At a party, Minnie and friend Kimmie have a threesome with Monroe. Minnie tells Kimmie that she loves Monroe, but then overhears him reassuring her suspecting mother that there's nothing between them. Again

they agree to abandon the affair, but sleep together once more. They take acid, whereupon an inconsolable Monroe confesses his love for Minnie. Charlotte finds Minnie's tapes and learns of the relationship. Upset and stoned, Charlotte insists that Monroe do right by her daughter and marry her. Minnie leaves home, taking drugs with casual lover Tabatha, but later returns to a forgiving Charlotte. She receives a letter from her favourite cartoonist, encouraging her to keep drawing. Dancing alone in her room she resolves that perhaps life isn't about being loved by somebody else.

Dope

USA 2015 Director: Rick Famuviwa Certificate 15 102m 44s

Splendour in the Grass (1961) and An Education (2009), for example – have tended to treat young female sexual experience as definitively formative, something from which there is no way back, Heller's handling of Minnie's 'awakening' has no such sense of finitude. Rather, the film makes clear that her nascent sexuality will not be lost over time, not thrown out with the bathwater when her relationship with a man 20 years her senior has run its course. Though the affair is instigated on the pendulum upswing of pubescence, its vicissitudes – as is true of many first relationships - are not conditioned by youth, but will resurface, familiarly, in the future. Heller's funny, highly intelligent film excels at representing this transition for what it is: fluid.

That Heller succeeds in this is partly thanks to the personalities of her characters. Minnie is outgoing, Monroe easygoing. Their compatibility and mutual consent are all they need for a starting gun. The difference in age would have one assume that Monroe is a Humbert Humbert type, but that's not the case. Nor he is like Fernando of Catherine Breillat's Fat Girl (2001), who takes advantage of the teenage Elena, bargaining for her virginity. Monroe is no more guilty of cajolery than Minnie is a victim. In fact, there is a reciprocity and simplicity to their relationship of a kind rarely seen on screen between partners of any age. They are equals in so far as they both desire the same thing: sex. They are also alike in denying their betrayal of Minnie's mother Charlotte, which is furthest from their minds when they're having sex.

It's because of this mutuality that the film is very sexy – and also because it knows when to cut. There are no protracted sex scenes, only flashes of sexual encounters which, evenly spaced, are noteworthy for their naturalism. Permitting her audience to enjoy these scenes by minimising any sense of voyeurism seems to be part of Heller's non-judgemental approach: she wants us draw our own conclusions as to the rectitude of her characters. The realism of the sex scenes is in keeping with the film's flat plotting and its commitment to the banality of emotional revelation, always eschewing 'the big moment' for the more lifelike bathos of, for example, professing one's love aloud.

Perhaps the film's most surprising message is that immaturity is something to be prized. Heller does much to deflate the idea of 'adult' as an honorific. It was play-fighting and making fun that ignited Minnie and Monroe's affair in the first place, and these are things that Minnie will look for in relationships to come. The sole subscribing-adult character here is Minnie's stepfather Pascal, who takes her and her sister Gretel for espressos and insists they call him 'Dad'. When Minnie suggests that if he really wants to help raise them he might assist financially, he calls time on their meeting: "This conversation is closed, you're getting emotional," he says, as if emotion were fatuity.

When Minnie and Gretel are seen strolling on the beach as the film's end credits roll, we are (gratefully) reminded that there is no sudden waking into a woman's body and mind, no line in the sand that one steps over and becomes a woman. §

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

The central character in Rick Famuyiwa's overly slick high-school comedy/crime caper Dope is Malcolm (Shameik Moore), an African-American student and self-identifying 'geek' who excels academically, has a fetish for 1990s popular culture and, with his friends Jib (Tony Revolori) and Diggy (Kiersey Clemons), plays in a punk band called Awreeoh. Their name – a smartly ironic riff on the name Oreo, a cookie that's dark brown on the outside and white on the inside – is one of the film's few genuinely good jokes. If their songs sound suspiciously polished and radio-friendly, it's because they've been written by musical megastar Pharrell Williams.

Malcolm wants to attend Harvard but his dreams seem circumscribed by his surroundings: he lives in a rough, crime-riddled area named 'The Bottoms'; he refers in an arch voiceover to his stereotypically underprivileged upbringing (absent father, overworked single mother); and his application essay – a critical analysis of rapper Ice Cube's 1993 hit 'It Was a Good Day' − is dismissed by his supervisor as a sign of his arrogance. Malcolm unexpectedly comes into possession of a bounty of drugs, and finds that selling them might be his way out; this is the moral dilemma upon which the narrative hinges.

On one hand, it's tempting to laud *Dope* for broadening the ethnic, racial and socioeconomic scope of what we've come to expect from the teen-movie genre, a playing field which, as Charlie Lyne's recent documentary Beyond Clueless effectively demonstrated, is largely populated by white middle-class types. Yet the film gives Malcolm and his friends little to work with beyond cynical surface signifiers of cultural taste. Though Moore is an expressive performer, Malcolm is something of a blank, while the ethnically ambiguous Jib is barely characterised - his sole notable trait is his belief that he is qualified to use the word 'nigga', presumably because he sees it as a state of mind (like Chinatown?). The epithet peppers Famuyiwa's script with disturbingly egregious regularity, and its use - by a white character, not Jib - is only half-



Shameik Moore, Kiersey Clemons, Tony Revolori

heartedly challenged by Diggy late in the day. Meanwhile Diggy's defining characteristic is that she's a lesbian with a boyish appearance. In one supposedly humorous scene, she flashes her breasts at a vulgar club doorman to prove that she's a woman. Diggy, however, is the tip of Dope's iceberg of woman problems. Zoë Kravitz, as Malcolm's putative love interest Nakia, is a charismatic presence but woefully underutilised. As drug moll Lily, Chanel Iman has an even worse time of it: her role is limited to vomiting in Malcolm's face, publicly peeing in a bush and crashing a car, all while in a state of near undress. Moreover, for all *Dope*'s pretensions to modernity and freshness, there's no place on screen at all for dark-skinned black women.

The nostalgic obsession of *Dope's* characters is reflected in Famuyiwa's filmmaking approach. Plot-wise he pilfers liberally from Paul Brickman's Risky Business (1983), though he overcomplicates matters with myriad contrivances and implausible coincidences. His dialogue is Tarantino-esque in a bad way, riddled with unconvincingly discursive patter and tortured monologuing. With its expertly curated hip-hop soundtrack, eye-catching costumes and Rachel Morrison's gleaming, candy-coloured cinematography, *Dope* might be shiny on the outside, but it's a stale cookie on the inside. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Forest Whitaker Nina Yang Bongiovi Written by Rick Famuviwa Photography Rachel Morrison Edited by Lee Haugen
Production Designer Scott Falconer **Original Songs** Pharrell Williams **Original Score** Germaine Franco Production Sound Mixer

Produced by

©That's Dope, LLC Production Companies Open Road Films Production with Lam

Mary Jo Devenney

Costume Designer Patrik Milani

Other Entertainment in association with Revolt Films **Executive Producers** Pharrell Williams Michael Y. Chow Rick Famuyiwa David Lonner

Cast Shameik Moore Malcolm Tony Revolori **Kiersey Clemons** Diggy Kimberly Elise Lisa Hayes Chanel Iman Keith Stannfield Bug De'Aundre Bonds Stacey

Roger Guenveur Smith Austin Jacoby Forest Whitaker

Blake Anderson Will Sherwood Zoë Kravitz A\$ap Rocky Dom Quincy Brown Rick Fox Councilman Blackmon Amin Joseph The Voice Ashton Moio Lance Kap G Fidel X In Colou

narrator

[2.35:1]

Distributor Sony Pictures Releasing UK

California, present day. High-school senior Malcolm dreams of attending Harvard. With his friends Jib and Diggy, Malcolm goes to the birthday party of local drug dealer and gangster Dom, with the intention of wooing Dom's girlfriend Nakia. Two rival gang members ambush the party. Dom hides behind the bar and secretly stashes a large quantity of drugs and a gun inside Malcolm's backpack, Malcolm receives an anonymous phone call instructing him to hand the drugs to a man in a red car, but he also receives a call from Dom now in jail - warning him not to do so. Dom says the handover is a set-up and Malcolm should instead drop the bag off at the house of a man named AJ. However, AJ is not home, though it is soon revealed that this mysterious drug lord is in fact Austin Jacoby, a college admissions interviewer who effectively holds the keys to Malcolm's future. Malcolm tries to give Jacoby the drugs in his office, but Jacoby doesn't want them after this botched delivery - he instructs Malcolm to sell them. With the help of a computer hacker, Malcolm sells the drugs online via Bitcoin transactions, which he ties to Jacoby's bank account. He blackmails Jacoby and soon finds an invitation to Harvard lying on his bed.

The Ecstasy of Wilko Johnson

United Kingdom 2015 Director: Julien Temple Certificate 15 92m 25s

Reviewed by Frances Morgan

Wilko Johnson was the star of Julien Temple's Oil City Confidential (2009), which was both a history of the pub-rock band Dr Feelgood and a meditation on English pop music's relationship with place. The locus in this case was not a pastoral one but the Thames estuary town of Canvey Island, a sort-of seaside spot on the way to Southend in which the cheap neon of amusement arcades flickers against a backdrop of huge gas and oil terminals. Johnson, Dr Feelgood's guitarist, helped to articulate the poetry Temple saw in this environment, posing in front of dilapidated fun parks and describing the looming gasworks in Miltonic terms. Their sympathetic relationship is further played out in The Ecstasy of Wilko Johnson, which documents two years in the musician's life during which he is diagnosed with terminal cancer and then given, via surgery, the chance of survival.

At first, the film's story arc seems clear -Johnson will get sicker and eventually die – and so its form is relaxed and lyrical. All Temple needs to do is give Johnson the space to talk, while meditating more widely on mortality with quotes from Shakespeare, Blake and Thomas Traherne and clips from films including A Matter of Life and Death (1946), The Seventh Seal (1957) and Stalker (1979). Many of the excerpts are spoken and commented on by Johnson, who studied literature at university and briefly worked as an English teacher. Parallels are suggested between his 'ecstasy' – the clarity he feels on receiving his diagnosis – and the revelations experienced by the likes of Blake and Traherne, casting Johnson as a working-class English visionary of the present day. The musician's joy in the present is interspersed with ruminations on the past, and so Canvey's post-war history, including the floods that devastated it in 1953, is recapped here, retreading much of Oil City Confidential's ground.

There is a whimsical but attractive simplicity to the scenes featuring only Johnson and, off camera, Temple. When the rest of the world intrudes, more complicated questions arise about the narratives we want to see and hear around death. Going on breakfast TV to promote his 'farewell' tour, Johnson expounds on his recent satori: "You look at a dustbin or a pussy cat or something and you think, wow, the world is almost tingling with life! It's a euphoric feeling and I'm glad I've had it." Footage from a gig shows an audience



Still walking: Wilko Johnson

chanting "Bye! Bye! Bye!" back at Johnson at the close of 'Goodbye Johnny B. Goode'. Roger Daltrey, with whom Johnson records an album in 2014, attests to his friend's courage as the two play a live set together. These scenes are heartwarming — and who wouldn't want to feel such equanimity in the face of death, or have such concrete proof that their life's work has touched so many people? — but they remind you that, for all the sincerity of Johnson's Everyman persona, his life is an exceptional one, lived frequently in front of an audience. You find yourself asking to what extent he is sustained by performance, and to what extent he is performing now.

It is Johnson's musical performance that starts the chain of events leading to his new diagnosis and surgery. After taking a picture of Johnson at a gig, a surgeon, Feelgood fan and amateur photographer named Charlie Chan has a hunch that the inoperable pancreatic cancer initially diagnosed is in fact a different kind, and might respond to surgery. He contacts Johnson, who goes in for an II-hour operation and emerges frail and somewhat melancholy: his misery is back, he says.

At its conclusion, the film shifts register again, from straightforward documentary back to the contemplative one-man show of its beginning. Johnson sits by the sea wall with a practice amp and a guitar. "Bloody hell, I'm supposed to be dead," he muses, gingerly trying out a riff, "and here we are, watching the tide come in." §

Produced by Richard Conway Andrew Curtis Julien Temple Written by Julien Temple Director of Photography Steve Organ Editor Caroline Richards Sound Recordist

Credits and Synopsis

©Essential Nitrate Limited **Production Companies** Essential Arts

Gerard Abeille

Entertainment and Nitrate Film in association with Creative England, BBC Imagine, Stranger Than Fiction and Polite Storm present a Julien Temple Executive Producers Amanda Temple Richard Holmes Grace Carley Victoria Cadogan-Rawlinson Alan Yentots

A Field in England

(2013)

Det sjunde inseglet /The Seventh Seal (1957) Sayat Nova/ The Colour of Pomegranates (1968) Ironclad (2010) La Belle et la Bête (1946) Orphée (1950) Stalker (1979) A Matter of Life and Death (1946)

In Colour [1.78:1]

Distributor MusicFilmNetwork In January 2013, guitarist Wilko Johnson of the band Dr Feelgood was diagnosed with cancer of the pancreas and told that he had ten months to live. Director Julien Temple, who previously profiled Dr Feelgood in 2009's 'Oil City Confidential', documents Johnson's response to his terminal diagnosis and his activities following it, which include farewell concerts in the UK and Japan and making an album with The Who's Roger Daltrey.

Ten months pass and Johnson is still in fairly good health. After photographing him at a gig, fan and surgeon Charlie Chan suggests that the guitarist might have been misdiagnosed. It is found that Johnson's cancer is operable after all, and he undergoes gruelling surgery. As the film concludes, he is still in recovery, but starting to play music again.

52 Tuesdays

Australia 2013 Director: Sophie Hyde Certificate 15 114m 11s



Reviewed by Selina Robertson

"Once upon a time I had a mum who told me everything," says 16-year-old Billie (Tilda Cobham-Hervey) in the first of the video-diary entries that

punctuate this affecting Adelaide-set docudrama about change and the passing of time within an ordinary working-class family. An overarching coming-of-age framework incorporates not only Billie's transformation from girl to woman but also the decision of her lesbian mother Jane (Del Herbert-Jane) to gender transition and rename herself James. James needs space away from his daughter, but the two agree to meet for a couple of hours every Tuesday. Director/co-writer Sophie Hyde decided to work on parallel terms, shooting every Tuesday for a year. The film's real-time production, mixing documentary, video diary and fiction, places the very nature of time at the core of the drama.

The inevitable fracturing of the once intimate parent-daughter relationship becomes central with each passing Tuesday, the mood shifting from fun to confrontation. On one occasion Billie asks James point blank, "So will the women you date be lesbians or straight?" And when James asks Billie to simply tell him if he starts going bald, Billie questions whether this means he is more of a man. Through these momentary and sometimes charged exchanges, Hyde investigates the concept of gender identity and parenthood in flux.

James's early-phase transition reveals medical complications relating to testosterone, and inspires a plucky decision to start dating a female co-worker as a man. Billie's own path to self-determination turns out to be perhaps the more engaging journey of the two, framing James's more contained adventure. Sent to live with her father Tom (Beau Travis Williams), who has equally conflicted opinions about James's decision to live as a man, Billie meets two older school friends, Josh and Jasmin, and begins spying on their clandestine sexual exploits. This leads her into an investigation of her own sexuality as the trio embark on a sexually charged three-way friendship, which Billie decides to document with her camera for a school art project. The finished article, which contains scenes of underage sex intercut with musings on change and time, helps Billie to define who she is becoming. At one point, Billie intercuts her own video diary with that of a reallife daughter dealing with a similar situation, who overzealously declares herself happy that her parent has "the gift of an authentic life". Billie's questioning of and investigation into the truth of her own situation grounds the film in a welcome material reality, away from an easily consumed American pop-psychology culture.

Connections can be drawn between 52 Tuesdays and Cate Shortland's Somersault (2004) or even Lucía Puenzo's XXY (2007), teen dramas that are equally fearless and revelatory in their coming-of-sexual-age narratives. In these films, young protagonists use their sexuality as a tool for survival and self-realisation.

Where 52 Tuesdays departs from those more rural companions is in its interior settings—



Ringing the changes: Del Herbert-Jane, Tilda Cobham-Hervey

kitchens, bedrooms, restaurants and abandoned warehouses. Screens are fixed within screens, narratives deconstructed, and time is mediated every Tuesday for a year. Of course, long-shoot projects with non-professional actors are not a new phenomenon: Michael Apted's pioneering Seven Up! television series, Richard Linklater's recent Oscar-winning Boyhood and Pedro Costa's upcoming Horse Money all foreground the philosophical and subjective experience of time.

James too decides to document his transformation, turning the camera on himself to record changes in his body mass, voice and mood. His real-time and real-life experience (non-professional actor Del Herbert-Jane was also undergoing hormone-replacement therapy) adds further weight to the notion of documenting

'real' time in cinema. The significance of connecting with lived experiences, whether politically, socially or culturally, is never more adeptly drawn than when James, on a whim, visits a transgender conference in San Francisco, linking 52 Tuesdays back in time to Monica Treut's Gendernauts, a documentary that formally explored the burgeoning transgender movement in the late 1990s. Hyde's film harks back to the politically conscious yet aesthetically fabulous work of the New Queer Cinema, a reminder that the battle for full LGBTQ rights is going on around us in real time. The ticking watches, clocks and digital counters of 52 *Tuesdays* move us to the heart of our now. The vicissitudes of gender and temporality have never been so pertinently explored. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Bryan Mason Matthew Cormack Sophie Hyde Screenplay Matthew Cormack Story Matthew Cormack Sophie Hyde Cinematographer Bryan Mason

Bryan Mason Production Designer Sonhie Hyde Composer Benjamin Speed **Location Sound** Leigh Kenyon Josh Williams Dane Hirsinger

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Australian Film Corporation & Adelaide Film Festival **Companies** The South Australian Film Corporation and the Adelaide Film Festival present a Closer production Developed with the assistance of

Screen Australia

association with Adelaide Film Festival Developed and produced in

association with South Australian Film Corporation Cast Tilda Cobham

Produced in

Del Herbert-Jane Mario Späte Harry Beau Travis William Imogen Arche

Audrey Mason-Hyde

Distributor Peccadillo Pictures Ltd

F2.35:11

Adelaide, Australia, present day. Separated couple Jane and Tom tell their teenage daughter Billie that Jane wants to transition from female to male. Billie is sent to live with Tom. Jane, self-defined as James, asks Billie if she wants to meet every Tuesday after school for a year; Billie reluctantly agrees. At school, Billie meets the older Josh and Jasmine, and secretly spies on their sexual exploits. She starts a sex-film project with them, using her uncle Harry's empty warehouse. Meanwhile, James stops taking testosterone for health reasons. Billie finds it increasingly hard to deal with James's new gender; she spends more time working on the sex films. Harry finds out about the secret meetings at his

warehouse and tells Tom; in a family therapy session, Billie is forced to confess what's been going on. When a teacher intercepts a photograph of a naked Billie meant for Jasmine, Tom, James and Billie are called in to talk to Billie's headmistress. James travels to a transgender conference in San Francisco. Harry seizes Billie's camera with the sexually explicit footage. James confronts Billie about her film; Jasmine, Josh and Billie's families meet to decide what to do with the footage - the friends want it destroyed, but Harry still has one tape left. Tom has an accident on his scooter; while Billie is visiting him in hospital, Harry gives up the final tape.

45 Years

United Kingdom 2014 Director: Andrew Haigh Certificate 15, 95m 7s



Reviewed by Roger Clarke

After the astonishing critical and commercial success of his second film Weekend (2011), Andrew Haigh is back with a new feature that for

the first time moves away from gay storylines (2009's Greek Pete was about a rent boy, and Haigh's contributions to HBO's Looking were also usually gay-themed). It's a gear change that at least subliminally recalls François Ozon, and not just because of Charlotte Rampling's turn in *Under the Sand* (2000).

In 45 Years, Rampling plays Kate, whom we first encounter returning from an earlymorning walk near the Norfolk Broads. A postman has a letter for her husband Geoff (Tom Courtenay). At the kitchen table, the letter is opened: it's a communication from the Swiss authorities revealing that the body of Geoff's great lost love Katya, who plunged to her death in the mountains in 1962, has been found in a snowmelt, staring up from the ice deep inside a glacier. From this brilliant, almost Joycean proposition of frozen romantic perfection ruining a party (see 'The Dead'), it seems at some points that Kate and Geoff's marriage may not even survive until the following weekend, when a celebration for their 45th wedding anniversary has been arranged on a fairly grand scale.

45 Years that can be viewed in very distinct ways. You can either see it as a portrait of two people – not quite kindred spirits but muddling-along firm friends – who have grown happy and old together, only for the husband to fall prey to a dangerous delusion about the marriage itself, perhaps brought on by a deterioration in his health and mental capacity. On the other hand you can take a far bleaker view: that it's a tale of 'truth will out', and that by a horrible coincidence a major relationship landmark has been thrown into an unforgiving light by a macabre revelation.

This is a film that stays with the wife. Haigh's interest is very much in Kate, who is in almost every scene. Over the course of the week we see her soldiering on with the business of organising the party, despite increasing evidence that her husband is going off the rails. There are some tender scenes, but they can often be construed in different ways - when Kate bandages Geoff's hand, for example, we don't know whether his explanation for the injury is true or false. Was there ever really a broken ballcock – or was he scrabbling to unlock the attic storeroom and the treasures of the past? Kate and Geoff appear to be childless and devote most of their love to their dog Max (possibly a cinephile joke - see Max mon amour).

Time is always hovering in 45 Years - clock faces, clocks ticking, the sound of clocks chiming. In town (Norwich, though it's not named), Kate gazes twice in the window of a jeweller's, and on both occasions decides against buying her husband a wristwatch. Each time the town clock chimes behind her - first it's three times, then ten. "I was going to get you a watch," Kate tells Geoff in the taxi on the way to their anniversary party at the end of the film. "I like not knowing the time," he replies.



Out of the past: Tom Courtenay, Charlotte Rampling

Courtenay's character Geoff seems caught up in an escalating series of absences and disorientations. A lunch thrown by his old work colleagues enrages him; it doesn't help that Kate has forced him to go. Then she comes back to find him listening to music and reading books that he associated with Katya, and discovers that he's planning to fly to Switzerland to gaze on the face of his former love on the very eve of their 45th year.

The script, co-authored by Haigh with David Constantine, writer of the original short story, is full of majestic, despairing notes; the look of the film is muted and wintry. The aural landscape is remarkable: from the opening noise of a slide projector working in the darkness (a pre-echo of

Rampling in the attic looking at images of the woman her husband really wanted to marry) to the hummed tune of 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes' as she takes the fateful letter from the postman, all the sounds make for subtle emotional influence, beautifully thought out and arranged.

Both actors give stunning performances. Rampling's evokes wordless horror as brilliantly as she always does, with angry, jealous looks. In the faraway Alps a frozen face is opening its eyes. The lights flashed around the room by the glitterball are like silver snowflakes, "falling, like the descent of their last end, upon all the living and the dead". Is the marriage sick, or is one of them sick? We'll never know - the temperament of the viewer will colour that in. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tristan Golighe Written by Andrew Haigh Based on the story In Another Country by David Constantine Director of Photography Lol Crawley Editor Jonathan Alberts

Production Designer Sarah Finlay Supervising Sound Editor Joakim Sundström Costume Designe

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support of Creative England, BFI's Film Fund Executive Producers Christopher Collins Lizzie Francke Sam Lavender Tessa Ross Richard Holmes Vincent Gadelle Louisa Dent Philip Knatchbull

Charlotte Rampling Kate Mercer Tom Courtenay Geoff Mercer Geraldine James **Dolly Wells** David Sibley

Cast

T1.85:11 Distributor Curzon Film World

Norfolk, present day. Retired couple Kate and Geoff are preparing for their 45th wedding anniversary party when Geoff receives a letter from the Swiss authorities informing him that the body of a woman named Katya has been exposed in a melting glacier. Geoff was with Katya when she fell to her death in the mountains in 1962. Geoff and Kate's relationship comes under strain as Geoff reluctantly reveals that he and Katva had intended to marry. He starts reading books and listening to music that he associates with the dead woman. Occasionally he seems buoyant, and he and Kate make love, though later Kate is woken by the sound of Geoff searching in the attic for a photograph of Katya. Kate herself goes into the attic while Geoff is at a lunch party and finds that he has set up a slide projector with images of Katya. Kate watches them, and feels haunted by the other woman. She discovers that Geoff has secretly visited a travel agent to enquire about flights to Switzerland; when she confronts him, he denies that he is going.

Finally, the day of Kate and Geoff's anniversary party arrives. They are joined by a crowd of friends and family; Geoff makes an emotional speech and weeps sentimentally. Kate's face reveals that she doesn't believe a word he's said.

The Gallows

USA 2015 Directors: Chris Lofing, Travis Cluff Certificate 15 80m 43s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Every year, hundreds upon hundreds of American features go without theatrical distribution, national or international. I suppose it is possible that a few of them are worse than The Gallows in individual respects, but it's hard to imagine another movie that manages to be simultaneously so cynically conceived, incompetently mounted, draggily paced and poorly performed as Travis Cluff and Chris Lofing's film, which bears the imprimatur of Blumhouse Productions.

The Gallows, like another recent entry in the found-footage horror subgenre, Unfriended, contains exactly one original idea, that being its basic premise. The hook is the haunted auditorium, which every US school of a certain age and creakiness is purported to have – my middle school had Fay's Auditorium, which was said to be stalked by the unquiet ghost of the eponymous former principal.

Unlike *Unfriended*, which managed to sustain itself for most of its running time through the ingenuity of its laptop-screen mise en scène, The Gallows offers exactly nothing to recommend it. While the haunted auditorium is a concept with some potential, Cluff and Lofing – who also share credit for the alleged screenplay – show so little comprehension or interest in human motivation and feasible social interaction that it's impossible to go along with their set-up even for a moment. Twenty years after a tragic opening-night performance at Nebraska's Beatrice High School of a play called *The Gallows* – some kind of *Scarlet* Letter/Crucible mash-up – in which an understudy had his neck snapped by a set malfunction, the drama club is preparing to perform The Gallows again. The very idea that a community would opt to relive such a gutting tragedy is, of course, ridiculous. So is the presence of a trophy-case vitrine in the school dedicated to the memory of the dead actor, Charlie. So is the plan dreamt up by drama-club cameraman Ryan (Ryan Shoos) – our film's principal cinematographer, at first – to save his wooden-acting buddy Reese (Reese Mishler) from humiliating himself in the play. So is the idea that a callow, untrained actor like Reese would somehow land a lead role in a production at a large high school that would undoubtedly have a drama-geek hierarchy all



Have I got noose for you: The Gallows

Gemma Bovery

France/United Kingdom 20 Director: Anne Fontaine Certificate 15, 99m 20s

its own. So is the detail of having the performers use their own names in the film, as though this is all that's required to complete the *vérité* illusion in a movie phonier than a three-dollar bill.

Rampant illogic isn't necessarily a problem in a horror film, but Cluff and Lofing don't develop any compelling alternative nightmare logic that can stand in the place of behavioural realism. While Shoos's consummate jackass is a standout, the principals are one and all irksome, and the only suspense comes from waiting through interminable shots of hands testing locked doors and feet shuffling around a scuffed backstage for them to be dispatched.

It's a cheap, oafish piece of work that will nevertheless recoup its minuscule budget - found-footage horror is to horror what reality TV is to melodrama, a low-overhead knockoff that's threatening to displace the genuine item. The only thing The Gallows might be good for is hastening a boycott. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Jason Blum Guymon Casady Dean Schnider Benjamin Forkne Chris Lofing Travis Cluff Written by Chris Lofing Travis Cluff Director of Photography Edd Lukas Edited by Production Designer Stephanie Hass Zach Lemmon Sound Designer

Brandon Jones

Jessica Peter

Costume Design by

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. Production New Line Cinema presents a Blumhouse Entertainment 360, Tremendum Pictures production A film by Chris Lofing

& Travis Cluff **Producers** Dave Neustadter Walter Hamada Couper Samuelson Brad Jacobson

Cast Reese Mishler Reese Houser Pfeifer Brown

Steven Imhoff

Steven Hrdlicka

Debbie Hrdlicka

Pfeifer Ross **Rvan Shoos** Ryan Shoos Cassidy Gifford Travis Cluff Mr Schwendimar Jesse Cross Charlie Grimille

Dolby Digita In Colour [1.85:1]

Warner Bros International (UK)

Beatrice High School, Nebraska, 1993, At the openingnight performance of a play called 'The Gallows', lead actor Charlie is accidentally hanged by the neck and killed.

Twenty years later, the school stages the same play. The lead roles are taken by Reese and his crush Pfeifer. Reese's friend Ryan comes up with an idea to cancel the play, spare Reese the humiliation of giving an embarrassing performance and drive Pfeifer into his arms. With Ryan's girlfriend Cassidy, they break into the auditorium with the intention of disassembling the set, but are caught in the act by Pfeifer. After a confrontation they find that they are locked in the auditorium. While attempting to make their way out, they discover buried secrets about the 1993 production - Reese's father was meant to play the lead but backed out at the last minute - and are harassed by a phantom hangman who picks off Ryan and Cassidy, Reese realises that Charlie's ghost is taking revenge for the sins of the father. To save Pfeifer, he willingly steps into the hangman's noose. Pfeifer, however, is in league with the ghost - her mother was Charlie's girlfriend, and he was presumably her father.

Some time later, police officers close in on Pfeifer and her mother, only to be set upon and slaughtered by Charlie's ghost.

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Gemma Bovery (Gemma Arterton) is the perfect type to get a middle-aged romantic hot under the collar. Newly arrived in rural Normandy with her husband Charlie (Jason Flemyng), this English rose is pure catnip to local baker Martin (Fabrice Luchini), a Flaubert obsessive who can't help noticing the couple's resemblance to the protagonists of Madame Bovary, starting with their name. Played by Arterton with a charming franglais accent and plenty of knowing twinkle, Gemma wafts about the countryside in a series of skimpy floral dresses, oohing and aahing at the sheer Frenchness of everything while Martin looks on in helpless adoration. Luchini is the perfect foil for the lusciously sexy Arterton, his bovine face and deadpan delivery able to convey the agony of hopeless yearning even while wringing laughs out of Martin's every wince and sigh.

Soon, however, Martin's soppy fanboy routine hardens into something more controlling. Stalking Gemma from a distance, he learns that, just like Emma Bovary, she is having a steamy affair with a local hunk (Niels Schneider); fuelled by a growing conviction that she is doomed to meet the same tragic fate as her almost-namesake, Martin decides that he must intervene in order to save her from herself.

Director Anne Fontaine has created a faithful adaptation of Posy Simmonds's comic-book fable, but has chosen to dredge it with visual icing-sugar by situating the melodrama in an intoxicatingly gorgeous rural idyll. Every scene looks like a page from a high-end interior-design magazine; Christophe Beaucarne's mouthwatering cinematography is all colour-drenched woodland greens and sunlit pastel interiors.

In 2010, Arterton took a very similar sultrytemptress role in Stephen Frears's Simmonds adaptation Tamara Drewe, playing an updated version of Bathsheba Everdene in another



Gemma Arterton, Niels Schneider

theme-park rustic setting. But whereas Frears chose to play up the sharp-toothed satire of the original by incorporating comic-strip elements that distanced the audience from the action, Fontaine has smoothed the original into a piece of deceptively charming comedy, and makes us complicit in the heady flight from reality. Even in a such a frothy confection, though, she has not ignored the potential for satire: fantasies are at the heart of both Gemma's and Martin's problems, and the audience must first partake of the dream in order to feel the full force of the rude awakening.

In different ways, both characters are trapped by their impossible desires; married, grey-haired Martin will never be more than a kindly uncle figure to Gemma; and Gemma will never manage to mould her real existence, with its boring routines and domestic problems, into the glamorous and fulfilling lifestyle the film at first seems to promise her. Martin's absurd Flaubert fixation points up the fact that they are both living a fiction, but this is not just a question of ducking the harsh truths of life – the real danger they face is in surrendering their independence and decision-making to a pre-packaged narrative that they are powerless to alter. 69

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Philippe Carcassonne

Matthieu Tarot Sidonie Dumas Francis Boespflug Screenplay/ Adaptation/ Dialogue Pascal Bonitzer Anne Fontaine Based on the book by Posy Simmonds Director of Photography Christophe Beaucarne **Fditor** Annette Duterte **Art Director** Arnaud De Moleron **Original Music** Bruno Coulais Sound Brigitte Taillandier Francis Wargnier Jean-Pierre Laforce Costumes

@Albertine Productions, Ciné@, Gaumont, Cinéfrance 1888, France 2 Cinéma, BFI

Pascaline Chavanne

Production Cast Companies **Gemma Arterton** Gaumont presents an Albertine Productions Ciné@, Gaumont, Cinéfrance 1888. France 2 Cinéma co-production ith the participation of Canal+ France Televisions and OCS in association with Ruby Films Developed with the support of British Film Institute A film by Anne Fontaine in association with Ruby Films, Palatine Etoile 10, Soficinema 9 Developpement, Cofiloisirs, Cofinova Developpement Puissance 6 With the support of L'Angoa

Developed with

the support of

BFI's Film Fund

Gemma Bovery Fabrice Luchini Martin Joubert Jason Flemyng Charlie Bovery Isabelle Candelie Valérie Joubert Niels Schneider Hervé De Bressigny Mel Raido Patrick Pip Torrens Rankin Kacey Mottet-Klein Julien Joubert **Fdith Scob** Madame De Pascale Arbillot new neighbour Elsa Zylberstein

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1] Part-subtitled

Distributor Soda Pictures France, present day. Martin Joubert leads a quiet life running a bakery in rural Normandy. Obsessed with the works of Gustave Flaubert, Martin is intrigued to learn that a newly married English couple, Gemma and Charlie Bovery, have moved in across the lane from his house and seem oddly similar to the characters in 'Madame Bovary'. Charlie restores antique furniture while the beautiful Gemma is left to wander around aimlessly. She loves the bread and croissants Martin sells, and he is immediately besotted with her. He tries to befriend her, but also secretly spies on her and soon discovers that she is having a torrid affair with a young aristocrat. Convinced that Gemma will suffer the same tragic fate as the faithless Emma Bovary in Flaubert's novel, he intervenes by sending her a letter purporting to be from her lover, breaking off the affair. Martin's plan backfires when Gemma's marriage hits the rocks and she renews her acquaintance with her ex, Patrick. When Charlie returns home unexpectedly and finds them apparently locked in an embrace, he furiously pulls Patrick away despite his protests. But it transpires that Patrick was merely trying to save Gemma from choking: her love of Martin's bread. Patrick's unwelcome presence and Charlie's jealousy have combined to kill her after all.

Martin has learnt nothing from the experience: when his son jokes that their new Russian neighbour is called Anna Karenina, he can't wait to meet her.

Good People

USA/Denmark/Sweden 2014 Director: Henrik Ruben Genz Certificate 15, 90m 28s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

In last month's issue of Sight & Sound, Danny Leigh's feature about London movie locations concluded by pondering how filmmakers would represent the architectural and sociological changes brought about by gentrification. In some ways, Good People is the answer to that question, getting down to the brass tacks of how downwardly-mobile lower-middle-class characters are trying to survive in the narrow area between the city's scruffy past and the ever-proliferating glass boxes of its present. Unfortunately, these very real dilemmas are woven into a silly thriller plot that can't stop hitting you over the head with the facile 'money corrupts' moral.

Having lost his Chicago landscaping business in the economic downturn, Tom Wright (James Franco) has moved to London with his baby-crazy schoolteacher wife Anna (Kate Hudson) after inheriting his grandmother's rundown house in Mortlake. In the first 15 minutes, Tom is served with eviction papers for the place they've been renting while the renovations to grandma's house have been going wildly over-budget – but Tom doesn't tell Anna this, because he doesn't want to put a damper on 'sushi night', their euphemism for when Anna is ovulating and they try to conceive. Their romantic/goal-oriented evening ends early, however: after asking their downstairs neighbour to turn down the volume on his television, they discover that he's OD'd. Given that he's been dead for some time, how his TV began making loud noises just as Tom and Anna started foreplay manages to be both nonsensical and lazy writing, which is to say, a sign of things to come.

Tom discovers a large sum of money hidden in the ceiling of the dead neighbour's flat, and begins paying off his debts; Anna secretly spends some of it at an IVF clinic. Unsurprisingly, the cash was stolen from some very vicious East End gangsters, who originally took it from powerful French drug lord Khan (Omar



Rich list: Kate Hudson

Sy). Things are further complicated for the Wrights by the zealous detective inspector (Tom Wilkinson) investigating their neighbour's death, whose has a personal connection to the case: his daughter OD'd on Khan's heroin. Soon the sharks are circling around Tom and Anna, behaving with extreme self-interest regardless of which side of the law they're on, though the plot is structured in such a bland, linear way that there's little suspense in the Wrights' interactions with their aggressors.

Given that Marcus Sakey's source novel was set in Chicago, much of the dialogue lacks an authentic local flavour. There is, however, some creatively cruel use of violence that delivers some much needed jolts of adrenaline – a particularly bonkers moment occurs during the film's climactic finale, when the Wrights, Khan, the DI and the gangsters finally converge to fight to the death and Tom defends himself by constructing a false floor with spikes beneath it. This shamelessly bloody display feels as if it has been borrowed from another movie (a grindhouse remake of *Home Alone*, perhaps) but still results in a watery, wish-fulfilment ending. As such, the film seems destined to appear in someone's thesis about gentrification and not in any future retrospectives about city life. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Benjamin Forkner Eric Kranzler Tobey Maguire Matthew Plouffe Thomas Gammeltoft Matt O'Toole Mark Gill Kelly Masterson Based on the novel by Marcus Sakey Director of **Photography** Jorgen Johansson

Editor Paul Tothill **Production Designer** Kave Ouinn Musi Neil Davidge Sound Mixer John Casali Costume Designer Keith Madden

@Good Production Companies Millennium Films presents a Millennium Films, Film 360. Material Pictures Eveworks Fine & Mellow production Supported by the - The Minor Scheme in co-production with Filmgate

Films, Film I Vast **Executive Producers** Avi Lerner Trevor Short Boaz Davidson John Thompson

Cast James Franco Tom Wright Kate Hudson

Neil Sacker

Robert Katz

Tom Wilkinson DI John Halden Omar Sy Sam Spruell Anna Friel

Oliver Dimsdale Superindendent Ray Martin Diana Hardcastle

Marie Halden Thomas Arnold Duncan Michael Jibson Mike Calloway Diarmid Murtagh Marshall Maarten Dannenberg Francis Magee

Ben Tuttle Michael Fox Bobby Witowski

Dolby Digital In Colou [1.85:1]

Distributor Lionsgate UK

London, present day. A group of men steal drugs and a bagful of money from French gangster Khan. One of the men, Ben, betrays his accomplices and takes off with the loot. Later, American couple Tom and Anna are disturbed

by loud noise from the TV of their downstairs neighbour, Ben. They discover that he has died from an overdose. Cleaning out Ben's apartment, Tom discovers the money; he and Anna discuss what to do with it - they have fallen into serious debt while renovating a house inherited from Tom's grandmother. **Detective Inspector John Halden visits and questions**

Tom and Anna about Ben's death. The gangsters break into Ben's apartment and retrieve the drugs. Khan contacts Tom and asks for help reclaiming his property; Tom declines, making an enemy of Khan. One of the gangsters begins torturing Tom for information, but Halden intervenes. Halden confronts Tom and Anna about the money, and they agree to be bait for the gangsters. However, the plan goes awry and Tom and Anna are forced to flee to the house they're renovating, fighting off the gangsters and Khan. The house catches fire and burns to the ground. Halden gives Tom and Anna the remaining money.

Hard to Be a God

Russia 2013 Director: Aleksei Yurievich German



Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

If you read this review before seeing Aleksei German's Hard to Be a God, what I've written in the synopsis overleaf may be of some slight use; it will give you

roughly the same advantage that critics, with the benefit of press notes, have before writing about the movie. If you are reading this after you've seen Hard to Be a God, your reaction will be very like that of those critics reading the press notes after the film, a sigh of "Oh, that's what was going on!"

Hard to Be a God is a profoundly, wilfully destabilising experience, one in which all but the most astute viewer won't so much follow the plot on first viewing as struggle to get the gist of it, gleaning what they can from a smattering of expository voiceovers and the muttered monologues of the saturnine Don Rumata (powerfully built Leonid Yarmolnik). These are delivered between swills of moonshine and expelled snot rockets as he wades through the murk and mire of the planet Arkanar, which are increasingly mixed with blood and plopping viscera as the film moves along.

Arkanar closely resembles Earth in the superstitious Middle Ages, which is to say that it faintly resembles Earth today. German's final movie is based on a science-fiction novel by Arkady and Boris Strugatsky that he had been planning to adapt since the mid-1960s. He began shooting it a career and a regime change later in 2000, on the outskirts of Prague and in the Lenfilm studios, and it was completed after his death in 2013 by Aleksei A. German, his son, and Svetlana Karmalita, co-author of the film's screenplay and his wife. This would've allowed plenty of time in which to understand and present the material as a cogent narrative, but cogency wasn't German's aim. He wanted instead for the viewer to feel the squalor, confusion and contagious cruelty of the Dark Ages, which are for him the period's defining characteristics.

German orchestrated his film as a series of long-take sequence shots, every plane of the frame a turmoil of activity, including the extreme foreground, in which objects - Rumata's flexing gauntlets, fish and poultry, agog onlookers - are frequently thrust towards the viewer in the manner often attributed to chintzy 50s 3D movies. The result is a carnivalesque processional of sodden grotesques, trudging through an endless torrential autumn rain.

Shot in contoured, high-contrast black-andwhite, Hard to Be a God isolates faces from the crowd in chains of choreographed vignettes – in a real sense, the mob is the star of the film. To name but a few standouts: there's the muzhik who breaks from tooting a rude pipe to pantomime humping at the camera, the uncertain POV of which frequently realigns in the space of a single shot from that of Rumata to a third-person perspective. There are the Don's slaves, enchained by collars which, like almost every piece of forged-and-hand-tooled set dressing here, serves to ground the viewer in the all-consuming reality of this world, showing the mark of the artisan's practice as well as the wear of years. (The film doesn't just feel 'lived-in' but lived-and-died-in, for unchanging generations. If we take it as a



Touch of medieval: Leonid Yarmolnik

period piece, it is the most immersive instance of its type outside of Rossellini and Hou Hsiao-Hsien, though expressionist where their films are austere.) There is the pack of grunting cretins who are seen in the process of executing a poet by stuffing him headfirst in the cistern of an outhouse after taking care to burn his work. (A huge, huffing asthmatic lumbers down to witness the execution, still rankling over the insult of a bad review the condemned man gave him 40 years earlier – shared persecution does not seem to have made the literati of this world any more unified than those of our own.) There is the miserable would-be Da Vinci, covered in boils, lugging about the wreckage of a flying machine, and the swarms of casually vicious, flea-bitten orphan boys, one of whom we see copping a feel of the groin of a hanged man. There is the mountainous, walrus-moustached,

sad-eyed Baron Pampa (Yury Tsurilo), whom the Don must talk down from an alcoholic rage in which he wields an enormous claymore as if it weighed nothing. Even the dead retain their unnerving individuality, like the gawping corpse whose open mouth has collected a pool of water.

Finally, we are left with the Don himself, a man of culture – he quotes Pasternak's poetry as his own, for who's going to know? – sunken to a near-animal state, drinking from the moment he wakes, perpetually squiffed and belligerent, a swaying heap of plate mail shouldering his way through the crowds, seemingly convinced of his own legendary immortality. A bulwark straining against the disappearance of all hope of civilisation, he is perhaps the ever-embattled German's final self-portrait – and certainly the living embodiment of Schiller's "Against stupidity the very gods themselves contend in vain." §

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Rushan Nasibulin
ViktorIzvekov
Screenplay
Svetlana Karmalita
Aleksei A. German
Based on the novel by
Arkady Strugatsky,
Boris Strugatsky,
Cinematography
Vladimir Ilyin
Yury Klimenko
Editors
Irina Gorokhovskaya
Maria Amosova

Production Design Sergey Kokovkin Georgy Kropachev Yelena Zhukova Music Victor Lebedev Sound Nikolay Astakhov

Ekaterina Shapkaitz

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Production
Companies
Sever Studio

with Russia 1
TV Channel
produced with the
technical support
of Lenfilm Studio
Film Development:
CineLab Digital
Lounge
Executive Producer
Marina Dovladbegyan

Cast Leonid Yarmolnik Don Rumata Yury Tsurilo
Baron Pampa
Natalya Moteva
Ari
Alexander Chuth
Don Reba
Yevgeny Gerchal
Budakh
Pyotr Merkuryev
Gur
Ramiz Ibragimon
Muga
Sergey Stupniko

Zurab
Valentin Golubenko
Arata the Hunchback
Leonid Timtzunik
Arima
Valery Boltyshev
Ripat
Yury Nifontov
Don Tameo
Vladimir Yumatov
narrator

Dolby Digital In Black & White [1.85:1] Subtitles

Distributor
Arrow Films

Russian theatrical title
Trudno byt bogom

Planet Arkanar, present day. A team of scientists from Earth have for years been living incognito on Arkanar, a planet that resembles Earth in every respect, save for the fact that it never passed through the Renaissance and Enlightenment, and remains in the Middle Ages. These scientists have sworn not to intervene in the affairs of Arkanar, and this state of impotence has driven many of them into a life of dissipation. One of them, Don Rumata, goes about in the guise of a nobleman, a feared swordsman, but is nevertheless forced to stand by as Don Reba, along with the rebel peasants of Arata the Hunchback and the 'Grey' soldiers of Colonel Kusis, slaughters the

few remaining artists and thinkers who gather in Irukan, across the Pitanian swamps. Don Rumata goes searching for Budakh, a doctor of special ability who has gone missing in the purge, hoping to protect him from the Greys, and then from the monastic 'Blacks', an even more severe and punitive group who seize power after overthrowing Reba. Rumata, who finds Budakh but loses his beloved, Kira, forswears his neutrality and joins a violent uprising.

In the gory aftermath of the war, Arata is seen among the many dead. Having wreaked their vengeance, Rumata and a band of soldiers head off into the snowy wastes.

Housebound

New Zealand 2014 Director: Gerard Johnstone Certificate 18 106m 54s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

At once more archly complicated and more earnestly scare-seeking than its close precursor in well-received New Zealand horror-comedy, *What We Do in the Shadows* (2014), this ambitious, messy piece lacks the same consistently witty scripting but hits no shortage of highs nonetheless.

The initial set-up recalls the recent US effort Dark Summer: a teen criminal, trapped at home by an electronic ankle bracelet, is menaced by things that go bump both day and night. But where Paul Solet's film went for po-faced solemnity and a pitiable, puny lead character, Housebound swiftly establishes its protagonist Kylie (Morgana O'Reilly) as both authentically obnoxious and unambiguously kick-ass. The twisty ordeal that follows - in which domestic disturbances are variously attributed to the vengeful ghost of a murder victim, a feral manchild who lives in the plasterwork and a counsellor driven mad by working with ungrateful delinquents – keeps her pleasingly distant from the horror stereotype of panting, girly victim.

The scares are frequently highly effective, with first-time feature director Gerard Johnstone (who also scripted and did his own editing) displaying smart timing and judicious deployment of genre conventions. The comedy is a bit more hit and miss: though some of the moments intended to raise a laugh really work, others serve to slow the action, and not all the parts are cast as well as they could have been. The result is a piece that can feel a little meandering and confused, particularly in the final act, which presents such an onslaught of possible explanations for what has gone before that the excess of plot becomes unmanageable and certain characters just have to disappear mysteriously for long periods of time to ease the overcrowding.

Elsewhere, however, Johnstone shows a real skill for handling screen time and plot information. A scene in which Kylie is forced into a moment of emotional intimacy with her taciturn stepfather, who inadvertently provides her with a crucial clue at the same time, is at once funny, structurally useful and unexpectedly touching. And there's a straightforward but still hugely effective laugh when Kylie flees a heart-pounding confrontation with one of her nemeses, manages to get herself to the police station and pours out her shocking story of home invasion and murder... only to be met by bovine incomprehension



The slum of all fears: Morgana O'Reilly

from a yokel policeman with no idea what she's talking about. There's even an undercurrent of serious commentary here, about resentful elements in the midst of a family or society: racist babble about the local Maoris from Kylie's mother Miriam (who's played by the half-Maori actress Rima Te Wiata) is echoed in her baffled intolerance of her own troubled daughter, and in a final rant by demented youth counsellor McRandle (Cameron Rhodes) about the "bad eggs" on whom he's wasted his career.

Horror that can both adrenalise its audience and burst some of its self-important genre bubbles is a treasurable commodity; and if Johnstone has thrown a little too much into the mix with this debut, he's also proved himself worthy of bigger budgets in future. §

Credits and Synopsis

Producer Luke Sharpe Written by Gerard Johnstone Director of Photography Editor Gerard Johnstone Production **Designers** Jane Bucknell Anya Whitlock Mahuia Bridgman Cooper Sound Recordists Ande Schurr Ben Vanderpoel Gabriel Muller Costume Designer Lissy Patterson

©Kitchen Sink Films Production Companies The New Zealand Film Commission in association with Semi-Professional present
Completed with
the assistance
of a feature film
finishing grant from
the New Zealand
Film Commission
Executive

Executive Producers Daniel Story Chris Lambert Michael Kumerich Ant Timpson

Cast Morgana O'Reilly Kylie Glen-Paul Waru Amos

Rima Te Wiata Miriam Ross Harper Graeme Cameron Rhodes Dennis McRandle David van Horn

Justin **Ryan Lampp** Eugene Nick Innes
Kraglund
Nikki Si'ulepa
Leslie
Bruce Hopkins
Carson
Millen Baird

In Colour [2.35:1]

Constable Grayson

Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd

New Zealand, the present. Arrested after a bungled heist, delinquent teen Kylie is sentenced to house arrest at her childhood home, a dilapidated countryside property now occupied by her mother and stepfather. At the house, Kylie is increasingly alarmed by sounds and apparent apparitions; her mother declares that the house is haunted. One night, Kylie flees into the basement; her ankle alarm summons security officer Amos, who turns out to be an enthusiastic amateur paranormal investigator. Kylie discovers that her home was once a halfway house for troubled teenagers, and was the site of a girl's violent murder, still unsolved. Kylie requests a transfer to another location, but when her counsellor. Mr McRandle, is attacked by flying knitting needles, she is suspected. Kylie and Amos find a clue to the earlier murder - a dental plate: they begin to suspect a next-door neighbour, since he wears a dental plate. But when Amos confronts the neighbour, he suggests that the murder was the work of Eugene, a peculiar, agoraphobic runaway he once harboured. Kylie discovers Eugene still living in the walls. She tries to alert the police but isn't believed. McRandle recommends her commitment to an institution. Kylie and her mother notice that McRandle also wears a dental plate; records confirm that he worked at the halfway house at the time of the murder. After a prolonged and violent struggle, McRandle meets a bloody end.

Amos removes Kylie's ankle bracelet.
Eugene remains with the family.

Looking for Love

United Kingdom 2015 Director: Menelik Shabazz Certificate 15, 119m 28s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Menelik Shabazz's partially crowd-funded film, his first feature-length production since *The Story of Lover's Rock* in 2011, has a very specific focus: heterosexual relationships between black Britons. All his respondents are black, as are all but one of his 'experts'; mixed-race relations are mentioned only briefly in passing, and the LGBT community doesn't feature. It's a limitation, but also makes for thematic unity.

The film opens with these words on the screen: "The prettiest smiles hide the deepest secrets, the prettiest eyes have cried the most tears and the kindest hearts have felt the most pain," effectively setting the overall tone – one of qualified pessimism. We do meet at least one couple who have stayed married for 50 years, but the predominant impression is that, for whatever reasons, black Britons don't do relationships well. Shabazz himself, though describing *Looking for Love* as "a feelgood film", has defined the terms of his inquiry as "Why are there so many single black people across the UK? Why are we having problems relating? Do we really understand love? Do we recognise the need to heal?"

As this last question implies, many of the respondents trace these problems back to traumas in the past. Sometimes to their own childhoods: the matter of absentee black fathers, begetting kids with several women but never sticking around for any of them, inevitably comes up; but some people point to mothers who, they feel, were too busy nurturing their various transient relationships to pay much attention to the emotional development of their children. For others the root of the problem goes way further back, to the era of slavery, when, it's suggested, owners deliberately destroyed the natural family structure of their captives, often splitting families up so that fathers could have no part in the upbringing of their children. This, for one male respondent, lastingly damaged the black male since it "stripped from him his natural right to command the household".

The legacy of slavery apart, none of these problems is exclusive to the black community (Shabazz says his film "ultimately speaks to all hearts, beyond race and culture") but several respondents evidently feel such hang-ups are particularly acute among their ethnic group. Psychologist Umar Johnson posits a pathological sense of loneliness among black people, men especially; a woman suggests that "a lot of black men are scared of black women". (It's from this angle that a detour into mixed-race relationships might have been enlightening, if only by way of



Date expectations: Looking for Love

comparison.) "We seem to be so far removed from who we are as black people, as African people," says counsellor Anita Bey, "that sometimes we don't recognise each other as men and women." Many of these inhibitions, it's implied, are defensive; author Jackee Holder talks of there being "a lot of fear around revealing ourselves to other people", and Johnson even suggests that "we should not primarily be getting married for love" since, with love taken out of the equation, the risk of emotional damage is minimised.

If this makes the film sound a bit of a downer, it's leavened with a good deal of humour. A semi-rapped monologue by spoken-word artist Comfort vividly compares short-term relationships to fast food, "those snacks that'll fool you into believing you're full for a short while – a pound of flattery and extra buffness, one large portion of desire, a few slices of lust, a side order of fun, please-can-you-supersize-it kind of snack..." And we get a spirited confrontation between Mr Cee and Donna Spence over whether black men, or black women, are more averse to going down on their partners, how and why. The comedy is heightened by Mr Cee's wearing a huge bandage on his nose – the result, he claims, of a football accident. But given his assertion that vaginal fluids taste like battery acid, you can't help wondering if some irate woman took a swing at him.

Looking for Love, Shabazz tells us, sets out to ask, "How did we get this way, and how can we make things better?" Several answers are advanced to the first part of his question; but as regards to the second part, the only response seems to be, 'Just keep on talking'. §

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Menelik Shabazz
Cinematograper
Souleyman Garcia
Editor
Folasade Oyeleye
Dubbing Mixer
John York

©SunRa Pictures Ltd Production Companies SunRa Pictures A Menelik Shabazz film In association with Psychology News Associate producer: Black Cinema Club Executive Producer David Cohen

In Colour [1.85:1] **Distributor** Verve Pictures A documentary exploring the relations between the sexes as seen by a number of respondents, all black British. Some talk solo to camera, others discuss among themselves in twos and threes, and we're shown several exchanges from a spirited discussion group known as Undiluted Expressionz. Interspersed with these are comments from psychotherapists, psychologists and other experts, staged scenes showing speed-dating sessions, performances from dancers, singers and voice artists, drawings and paintings, period newsreel shots and lively footage from the 2013 Notting Hill Carnival.

Magic Mike XXL

USA 2015 Director: Gregory Jacobs Certificate 15 115m 11s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

A man interviewed at a 2012 screening of Steven Soderbergh's *Magic Mike*—a sly, sideways look at recession-hit male strippers—said that he'd come along because it was a "critique of capitalism". He may prefer to sit out this frothy, focus-grouped sequel, which concentrates on abs rather than analysis, abandoning its predecessor's darker questions for a sunny quest for 'one last show'.

Where Magic Mike examined the strippers' struggles, this rambling, good-natured 'roadstrip' looks resolutely on the bright side as Mike (an amiable Channing Tatum) joins the reduced Kings of Tampa troupe en route to a lucrative convention gig. Ably directed by Soderbergh's long-time assistant director and producer Gregory Jacobs but shot and edited by Soderbergh (credited as 'Peter Andrews' and 'Mary Ann Bernard'), the film retains the Instagram looks of the original while adopting a laidback, lightly comic tone. The pleasantly meandering plot's goal is shirtless, bro-tastic fun; unlike Pitch Perfect or Little Miss Sunshine, there's no competition to drive it. It's just a (G-)string on which to hang dance numbers, like a topless, gyrating version of Mamma Mia!

The film is also an unabashed crowd-pleaser, and has visibly put thought into servicing its key audience groups. Whether voguing cheerfully through a drag club, entrancing refreshingly multisized and multi-hued audience members with lap-dances or flirting with middle-aged mothers, *Magic Mike XXL* lets its fans feel represented. Most interesting is the troupe's lengthy visit to the private Domina lap-dance club where both dancers and clients are African-American, and where Mike (an ex-employee, as 'White Chocolate') finds new inspiration. It's here that the movie's animating idea, that of male entertainers as 'healers' who provide the sexual affirmation society denies females, takes root. Feelgood faux feminism it may be ("Yes, my God is a she," admits Mike) but it adds a curiously endearing note. Yet it's a tad overdone when the troupe salve the sexual woes of a houseful of Charleston women variously with song, soothing chat and seduction.



A crotch in time: Magic Mike XXL

With the largely female cinema audience whooping at each dance number like sailors on shore leave, there's also a knowing surfeit of male objectification on screen. This winking mix of sex-positive exhibitionism and self-parody is exemplified when one of the troupe, 'Big Dick' Richie (Joe Manganiello), attempts to coax a smile from a preoccupied mini-mart worker by putting on an improvised routine of comic, peacocking carnality, like an X-rated Diet Coke commercial.

Sensual healing delivered via the medium of full-contact dry-humping has largely eclipsed dancing this time around. A pity, since Tatum's fluid, athletic freestyling to Ginuwine's 'Pony' alone in his workshop outclasses the intricate but effortful simulated-sex 'mirror' routine that he and Stephen Boss perform at the film's convention climax. Here, two female subjects are flipped, positioned and ground on, like a dog humping a sofa. Porn imagery permeates this number. But the unintentional effect is like a softcore mash-up of Duck Soup's mirror gag and Donald O'Connor's Singin' in the Rain rag-doll wrestling. It underlines how Magic Mike XXL isn't so much celebrating women as handling them, gifting them men to be looked at, but keeping sex firmly as something that men do to women. Unsurprisingly, for a franchise that's more cash cow than critique nowadays, there's a stage show in the works. Make it rain, ladies. 9

Manglehorn

USA/United Kingdom 2014 Director: David Gordon Green Certificate 12A 97m 13s

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

David Gordon Green sometimes seems like a cult director who's misplaced his cult. Unlike, say, the self-mythologising Harmony Korine – who has a sizeable role in *Manglehorn* – Green hasn't kept a firm grip on his career narrative since around the time of 2004's *Undertow*, though there is a bit more method to the madness of Green's ambling filmography than merely wanting to keep working and not let the grass grow under his feet.

Manglehorn contains quotations from Godard's Weekend (1967) and Antonioni's Blow-up (1966). although, like every one of Green's films, its main inspiration is the all-American tall-tale back-porch yarn-spinning and jawing for the mere pleasure of hearing one's own voice. As in his 2013 film *Joe*, a vehicle for Nicolas Cage, Green is working on the parallel between star status and folk-hero stature. In this case the magic man is A.J. Manglehorn, a locksmith residing on the outskirts of Austin, Texas, who lives in self-imposed emotional withdrawal from the world around him. We never see Manglehorn do anything beyond the ordinary, but we know that there is something special about him. We know this because Korine's character Gary, who'd once played little league under the man he still calls Coach, says of him, "He's a man of miracles" – this after Coach has roughed Gary up and left him in a winded pile in the parking lot of his massage parlour/cathouse. We know this because we hear Manglehorn's estranged son Jacob (Chris Messina) recount a memory of seeing his father wreck the house one morning, only to find it perfectly restored to order on his return from school. Most of all, we know this because A.J. Manglehorn is played by Al Pacino.

The movie is, in effect, an inducement to savour the rich instrument of Pacino's voice. Green is that rare filmmaker who has managed to be influenced by Terrence Malick without being wholly in thrall to him (he is funny, for example, which Malick hasn't been since Badlands), and this expresses itself in part in his use of voiceover, which is frequent here. While we watch Manglehorn going about his quotidian rounds, he appears as someone we wouldn't glance twice at on the street – but that voice banishes any illusion of averageness.

In some respects what Green is doing when he treats us to the sight of Pacino poking around at a buffet or visiting a community 'pancake jamboree' is the opposite of the effect striven for by Alexander Payne in *About Schmidt* (2002) when he included the surreptitious-seeming scene of Jack Nicholson meekly ordering at a Dairy Queen counter. Green doesn't think to shrink a star persona down to the scale of ordinary people – in fact, the very idea of 'ordinary people' doesn't seem ever to have occurred to him. In this respect, each of these filmmakers is being true to his regional type – the self-effacing Midwesterner and southern eccentric. And like many an eccentric, Green sometimes seems to strain for unexpected effect, as in Manglehorn's out-of-nowhere burst-into-song interlude or the stylistic effusions – including luxurious lap dissolves and disorienting crosscutting - that give his straightforward narrative a woozy and discursive quality, as though the

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Nick Wechsler
Gregory Jacobs
Written by
Reid Carolin
Based on characters
created by Reid
Carolin
Director of
Photography
Peter Andrews
[i.e. Steven
Soderbergh]
Edited by
Mary Ann Bernard

[i.e. Steven Soderbergh] Production Design Howard Cummings Sound Design Larry Blake Costume Design Christopher Peterson Choreography Alison Faulk

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and RatPac-Dune Entertainment, LLC Production Companies Warner Bros. Pictures presents in association with RatPac-Dune Entertainment Completed with assistance from the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office Participated in the New York State Governor's Office for Motion Picture & Television Development's Post Production Credit Program **Executive Producer** Steven Soderbergh

Channing Tatum Mike Lane, 'Magic Mike', 'White Chocolate' Matt Bomer Joe Manganiello

Big Dick Richie; BDR'

Kevin Nash

Tarzan'

Adam Rodriguez

Tito

Gabriel Iglesias

Tobias

Amber Heard

Zoe

Donald Glover

Andre

Andre MacDowell

Nancy Davidson

Stephen Boss Malik Jada Pinkett Smith Rome

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

Florida, present day. Three years after retiring from the stripping business, Mike Lane, now a furniture maker and newly single, joins the depleted Kings of Tampa troupe for one last road trip to a male stripping convention in Myrtle Beach. They win a drag-bar voguing competition, and Mike meets floundering photographer Zoe. Mike encourages the troupe to create new routines inspired by their personal passions. MC Tobias crashes the bus while they're high on MDMA, and is hospitalised with concussion.

Mike persuades club owner Rome, an old friend, to replace Tobias as their convention MC, and does a floor show at her private club. Offered an overnight stay in Charleston, the troupe flirt with a group of middle-aged women. Mike asks Zoe to the convention. In Myrtle Beach, Rome inveigles a convention spot for the troupe. Renamed Resurrection, they rehearse new routines, including personalised lap-dancing solos. Zoe is lap-danced by Mike in a mirror routine with Rome's club star Malik. The boys have a last drink together.



Attack the lock: Al Pacino

storyteller is being distracted by some detail he's just remembered. (I still think Green comes off better than Paul Thomas Anderson, whose audacious leaps are both more calculated and more weighted with pretence.)

Manglehorn, as we meet him, is a man afflicted. He has ceased to take an interest in people, and so it falls to Dawn (Holly Hunter), a bank teller with whom he carries on a running flirtation, to shake him from his stasis. Though Manglehorn is totally insensate, unable to see past his own false nostalgia, she openly and warmly expresses her beatific worldview to him: "I love life, like I'm a baby. I just wake up excited every day that I'm alive. I love everything, I really do." (As ever, Green is working with cinematographer Tim Orr, who renders the familiar resplendently.)

The way that Manglehorn gradually opens himself up again to the possibility of astonishment is in keeping with the overall affirmation running through Green's work. Here

he continues to pursue an attraction to stories hung on whopping big central metaphors, like *Prince Avalanche* (2013), a tender movie that matched the process of heartache and reconciliation with the recovery of a fire-ravaged landscape, or Joe, in which Tye Sheridan's lost teenager progresses from a job on a destructive tree-removal crew to working in a tree nursery. In Manglehorn, it is a matter of Pacino's character being cut off from himself by his prideful sorrow ("My own private prison," he calls it), much as his customers may have locked themselves out of their cars. No less than his protagonist, Green needs a shaking-up – despite fine work from Pacino and Hunter, here the groove that he entered with Prince Avalanche begins to seem dangerously like a rut. I'm not worried. Green, who did an about-face turn to comedy (Pineapple Express) after 2007's dolorous Snow Angels, seems the filmmaker least likely to surrender himself to incurious apathy. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Lisa Muskat David Gordon Green Derrick Tseng Christopher Woodrow Molly Conners Written by Paul Logar Director of Photography Tim Orr Edited by

Colin Pattor

Production Designer Richard A. Wright Music Explosions in the Sky David Wingo Sound Mixers Chris Gebert Justin Hennard Costume Designer III Newell

©Lock and Key, LLC. Production

Companies Worldview Entertainment presents in association with Dreambridge Films and WestEnd Films a Muskat Filmed Properties production in association with Rough House Pictures **Executive Producers** Danny McBride

Melissa Coolidge Todd Labarowski Maria Cestone Sarah E. Johnson Hoyt David Morgan

Jody Hill

Brad Coolidge

Cast Al Pacino Angelo Manglehorn, 'A.J.' **Holly Hunter** Day Chris Messina Skylar Gasper Brian D. Mays

Herculano Trevino Robbie Angela Woods

Marisa Varela

Dolby Digital In Cold [2.35:1]

Distributor Curzon Film World

Texas, present day. A.J. Manglehorn, a locksmith in late middle age, works and lives alone, save for his ailing Persian cat Fanny. When not composing letters to his lost love Clara, he flirts with Dawn, a teller at his bank who is also an animal lover. While playing the slot machines at a casino, Manglehorn is reunited with Gary, whom he once coached in little league baseball and who now owns a tanning salon/massage parlour. Manglehorn attempts to use the news of his friendship with Gary to goad his son Jacob, a successful businessman, over dinner, The meal ends in bickering, though Manglehorn's

play-date with his granddaughter is more successful. Fanny has to undergo surgery after swallowing a key. Dawn manoeuvres Manglehorn into going on a date, though he ruins the evening by babbling about the departed Clara right through her invitation to share a bath. Manglehorn visits Gary's salon, only to learn that it's a brothel, and has a falling out with the proprietor. Shortly afterwards he is reunited with Jacob, now under financial investigation. As Fanny recovers. Manglehorn empties the contents of a locked room that he has kept as a shrine to Clara. and convinces Dawn to give him a second chance.

Max

USA 2015 Director: Boaz Yakin Certificate 12A 110m 50s

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

As viewers are informed in one of Max's many earnest moments, "Dogs are good judges of character." But as astute as the eponymous protagonist of Boaz Yakin's canine-centric family drama is when it comes to sniffing out the good guys and growling at the bad ones, he's not such a discerning judge of material. Carlos, the Belgian Malinois who leads the cast of well-intentioned humans and menacing pit bulls, is unable to turn Max into anything other than a clichéridden and charmless variation on those movies about dogs that play basketball or crack tough cases with Tom Hanks. The difference here is that Max's talents involve sniffing out trouble during combat operations in Afghanistan.

There's no doubting the sincerity of Yakin's motives for making Max. He dedicates the film to the 26 dogs and 25 handlers who have been killed in US military operations in the past quarter of a century. A series of images during the end credits illustrates too the history of dogs in war; though they're no longer trained to viciously attack Cimmerian troops as they were in 600 BC, they have been regularly employed during America's operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Their duties include sniffing out drugs and weapons, as well as finding missing soldiers and enemy combatants like the ones responsible for the ambush that kills Max's handler Kyle.

As perfunctory as the film's early Afghanistanset scenes may be, they provide glimpses of the hero doing what he's been trained to do. The opening raid may also be a fair indication of how Afghan villagers react when the imperialist American dog searching their homes is an actual dog. Unfortunately, Kyle's death sends the action back to his family in Texas, thereby dashing the hopes of any viewer who ever wondered what The Hurt Locker might've been like as a vehicle for Rin Tin Tin. The increasingly hokey events that ensue also sideline another potentially intriguing subject - post-traumatic stress disorder as experienced by military dogs. Instead, Max returns swiftly to his old self with the help of Kyle's teenage brother Justin. With threats and violence kept at strictly PGappropriate levels, Max, Justin and their Scooby Gang of friends have little trouble foiling the nefarious schemes of Kyle's no-good army colleague Tyler. All that's missing from the climactic moments is for the villain to exclaim, "And I would've gotten away with it if it weren't for you meddling kids and your dumb dog!"

The two most prominent adult humans here, Thomas Haden Church and Lauren Graham



Dog soldier: Carlos, Josh Wiggins

as Kyle's parents Ray and Pamela, perform their tasks with a stoicism befitting a film that strenuously valorises military service and never misses an opportunity to show a waving flag. "You're not a Marine," Ray tells Tyler when he learns the full extent of his villainy.

Alas, the pleasures that can be derived from *Max*'s instances of *Air Bud*-style animal-movie kitsch are undermined by the film's distressing ineptitude. Yakin showed considerable promise with his first feature, the taut urban drama *Fresh*(1994), but *Max* fails to achieve even the classy hokum of Yakin's football tearjerker *Remember the Titans* (2000). Carlos should be choosier in future. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Karen Roser Ken Blancato Written by Boaz Yakin Sheldon Lettich Director of Photography Stefan Czapsky Bill Pankov Production Designer Kalina Ivanov Music Trevor Rabin Production Ionathan Gaynor Costume Designer

©Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. (the universe excluding MGM retained territories)

Ellen Lutter

@Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures Inc. and Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. (MGM retained territories) Production Companies Warner Bros. Pictures and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Pictures present a Sunswent Entertainment production A Boaz Yakin film Executive Producers Ben Ormand Boaz Yakin

Ray Wincott

Robbie Amel

Kyle Wincott

Tyler Harne

Mia Xitali

Owen Harn

Deputy Stack

Dolby Digital/ Datasat

In Colour

Colour by

Del uxe

F2.35:11

Pictures

Distributor

Warner Bros

International (UK)

Carmen

Carlos

Max

Luke Kleintanl

Dejon LaQuak

Gast
Josh Wiggins
Justin Wincott
Lauren Graham
Pamela Wincott
Thomas Haden
Church

retained territories) Church

An Afghan village, present day. US Marine Kyle
Wincott and his military dog Max find a stash
of arms. Later, Kyle hears that the weapons
have gone missing: his friend Tyler has been
smuggling them back to the US. During a patrol,
Max signals caution but Tyler urges Kyle on;

the Marines are ambushed and Kyle is killed In Texas, Kyle's father Ray, mother Pamela and younger brother Justin are devastated by the news. Max's trainer arrives at the funeral with the dog. now too unstable for service. The Wincotts agree to take the dog. Initially reluctant, Justin bonds with Max, especially after he is given training advice by Carmen, cousin of his best friend Chuy. Discharged under suspicious circumstances, Tyler visits the Wincotts; Ray gives him a job at his storage facility. Justin discovers that Tyler has been selling arms to local gangster Emilio. When Justin threatens to expose him, Tyler says he will reveal that Justin has been selling pirated videogames to Emilio. Tyler tells Ray that Max caused Kyle's death; Ray is about to shoot the dog when Justin and Pamela intervene. In the woods, Justin and his friends spy on Tyler, Emilio and Stack, a corrupt policeman, as they arrange an arms deal with Mexican criminals. Max fights with Stack's pit bulls. Tyler falsely claims that Max bit Stack, and the dog is impounded. Ray goes to his facility and finds Tyler and Stack loading arms into a truck. They kidnap Ray. Max escapes from the pound and leads Justin, Chuy and Carmen to the criminals. Tyler is about to shoot Justin when Max pushes him off a bridge to his death.

Justin and Max visit Kyle's grave and return home to Ray, Pamela, Chuy and Carmen, who is now Justin's girlfriend.

No Escape

USA 2014 Director: John Erick Dowdle Certificate 15 103m 12s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Director John Erick Dowdle's previous work has been in horror films – the efficient *Devil* (2010) and *As Above, So Below* (2014). Which may explain why the American family escaping a South-East Asian coup in this pacy but generic thriller are running from monstrously cruel and undifferentiated rebels, who might as well be vampires or zombies. An escape story of the 'ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances' variety, it effectively conveys the relentless tension of evading capture and summary execution.

As a street market becomes a battleground around Owen Wilson's bewildered father, and a rooftop 'rescue' skews suddenly into a tourist shooting gallery, Dowdle's in-the-action filming catches the disconcerting chaos of sudden violence. The camera obeys the rules the family are given for crossing hostile terrain: "Be fast, be quiet, be close." Yet the film makes little attempt to understand the issues of the coup, bar a throwaway admission from Pierce Brosnan's grizzled CIA protector that western political and corporate interests are at fault. Wilson and a

believably rattled Lake
Bell perform staunchly,
but it's pretty thin
stuff, despite a veneer
of topicality.

Owen Wilson



Produced by Drew Dowdle Michel Litvak David Lancaster Written by John Erick Dowdle Drew Dowdle Director of Photography Léo Hinstin Editor Elliot Greenberg Production Designer Arv Greywal Music Marco Beltrami **Buck Sanders** Production Sound Mixer David Madigan

Stunt Co-ordinator Kawee Sirikhanaerat ©Coup Pictures, LLC. Production Companies The Weinstein Company presents in association with Bold Films a Brothers Dowdle production

Costume Designer

Annie Bloom

production
Executive
Producers
Gary Michael Walters
Jeffrey Stott
Andrew Pfeffer
Steve Alexander

Sterling Jerins
Lucy Dwyer
Claire Geare
Beeze Dyer
Pierce Brosnan
Hammond

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
El Films

Cast

Owen Wilson

Jack Dwyer

Annie Dwye

Lake Bell

South-East Asia, present day. American water engineer Jack Dwyer, his wife Annie and their two small daughters are caught in a coup on the first day of their relocation to the area. Insurgents kill the other foreigners in their hotel. The Dwyers escape via the hotel roof and survive the rebels' killing spree in an office block. Captured in the city the following night by a rebel patrol, they are saved by undercover CIA operative Hammond and his local sidekick. Hammond is killed protecting them. Caught buying a boat, Jack and Annie are forced to kill a pair of rebels who are about to kill Jack. The family escape downriver, crossing the Vietnamese border under rebel gunfire.

North v South

United Kingdom 2015 Director: Steve Nesbit

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

Star-crossed lovers and warring gangs hint at a Shakespearean gloss, but this dismal modern-dress British crime farrago barely deserves a mention in the same sentence as its Verona-set forebear.

In part that's because this saga of internecine scheming seems so hermetically sealed inside its own little bubble of over-plotted, undercharacterised carnage that it creates little in the way of thematic relevance or emotional resonance. Indeed, as the largely academic passage of thrust and counter-thrust grinds tediously onwards, the narrative has trouble keeping up with itself, necessitating reams of tiresome explanatory voiceover from the youthful lovers on the margins of the mayhem, a timescale that appears to defy rational analysis and the 'surprise' resurrection of various characters.

Very occasionally the dialogue offers a stray smile – as when Steven Berkoff's shouty southern crime lord dismisses a would-be-Gallic cross-dressing assassin as a "fucking faggotty froggy fuck" – but for the most part, the film's wholly ill-judged, studiously furrowed seriousness precludes anything resembling enjoyment. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Benjamin Foottit Mark Foligno Written by Steve Nesbit Director of Photography Kyle Heslop Editor Kim Gaster Production Designer John Ellis Music by/Music Supervision Neil Athale Sound Recordist Richard Miller Costume Designer Georgina Napier Stunt Co-Curtis Rivers

©North South Films Ltd Production Company North South Films Executive Producers Susie Foottit Lawrence King Nigel Stafford

Cast Steven Berkoff Vic Clarke, southern boss Freema Agyeman

Penny, northern
captain
Elliott Tittensor
Terry Singer
Charlotte Hope
Willow Clarke
Oliver Cotton

Oliver Cotton Brian Galloway, northern consigliere Keith Allen Tony Lefevre, southern consigliere Steve Evets Alf Sydney Wade

Geoff Bell
Bill Vincent
Gary Cargill
Danny
Dom Monot
Gustave
Brad Moore
Gry Little
Greta Scaachi
Mrs Singer
Bernard Hill
John Claridge,

northern boss
In Colour and

Black & White

Distributor Metrodome Distribution Ltd

England, present day. Tensions between the crime gangs of northerner John Claridge and southerner Vic Clarke are exacerbated when Clarke's underling Gary kills innocent passer-by Alf, who was Claridge's childhood friend. Claridge adopts the dead man's daughter, Sammi. Psychotic, ambitious Gary learns that Claridge's acolyte Terry is secretly dating Clarke's daughter Willow. Gary is ordered to eliminate Claridge's protégée Penny, then given leave to kill Terry as a reward. Terry, eager to protect Willow, has drugs planted on Claridge's property, and when the police arrive he grasses on Clarke, who's arrested on similar drugs charges. Gary shoots Terry and is then himself killed by crossdressing hitman Gustave, who in turn is shot by Sammi. A wounded Terry drives away with Willow.

Paper Towns

Director: Jake Schreier

Reviewed by Charlie Lyne

If the mark of great teen fiction is an ability to communicate with adolescents on their own level, then the voice of today's youth must surely be John Green, the American author whose YA novels understand not only the perennial truths of the teenage experience – isolation, yearning, a sense of wild abandon - but also the contemporary particulars, first and foremost the power of technology to accelerate self-discovery by providing a bridge between harmonious but distant voices.

After the phenomenal box-office success of The Fault in Our Stars, based on his 2012 bestseller of the same name, Green added Hollywood financiers to his already extensive list of devotees, ensuring that his other novels would soon also be adapted for the screen. First out of the gate is Paper Towns, a wistful coming-of-age dramedy in which teenage introvert Q (Nat Wolff) goes in search of childhood crush Margo (Cara Delevingne) after she vanishes from their quiet Florida subdivision without a trace.

The story is conventional – dream girls who disappear into the ether shortly after shaking up a male protagonist's life are a dime a dozen in teen cinema, and each generation has its defining specimen, from Rebecca De Mornay in Risky Business (1983) to Elisha Cuthbert in The Girl Next Door (2004) – but the visual language of Paper Towns is even more familiar. Indeed, while the film's characters and narrative developments are loyal to Green's novel, its semiotics owe more to the last 30 years of American comingof-age movies: a slow-motion corridor walk

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Wyck Godfrey Marty Bowen Screenplay Scott Neustadte Michael H. Weber Based on the book by John Green Director of Photography David Lanzenberg Edited by Jacob Craycroft Jennifer Lame Production **Designer** Chris Spellman Music Ryan Lott Production Sound Mixer leffree Bloomer Costume Designer Mary Claire Hannan

@Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation and

TSG Entertainment Finance LLC. Companies Fox 2000 Pictures presents a Temple . Hill production A film by Jake Made in association Entertainment This production participated in the New York State Governor's Office of Motion Picture & Television Development's

Post-production Credit Program Executive Producers John Green Isaac Klausner Nan Morales Scott Neustadter

Angela Cara Buono Connie Jacobsen **Dolby Digital** [2.35:1] Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK) Michael H Weber

Cast

Ouentin

Jacobson, 'Q'

Margo Roth

Cara Delevingne

Lacev Pemberton

Austin Abrams

Justice Smith

Marcus Lincoln

Ben Starling

Jaz Sinclair

Florida, present day. Once childhood friends, the teenage Q and Margo have become strangers. One night, however, Margo recruits Q to help her exact revenge on a cheating ex-boyfriend. The next morning she has disappeared. She has left behind a series of clues, which Q believes he must follow to determine her whereabouts. The clues eventually lead him and four friends on a 1.200-mile road trip to New York State, where he is reunited with Margo. She explains that she never meant for him to follow her, and scolds him for seeing her through rose-tinted glasses. They kiss, and Q returns home.



Teen dream: Cara Delevingne, Nat Wolff here, a thronging teen house party there.

Such imitative tendencies are not without purpose, allowing screenwriters Scott Neustadter and Michael H. Weber to deconstruct the rote

formulas of the modern teen movie in search of underlying truths. And just as a passing reference to the forgotten kiddie flick *Snow Dogs* (2002) hints at the presumed age bracket of the film's audience, this constant probing of genre clichés reveals a refreshingly complex understanding of the contemporary teenage taste for self-analysis.

It feels more than a little radical, for instance, when O's de facto wingman Ben (Austin Abrams) segues from a lusty assessment of his friend's mother into a forlorn admission of crippling adolescent loneliness ("I just want to ride bikes with her"), and downright astonishing when the film confronts what's traditionally been the teen genre's ultimate blind spot: race. Radar (Justice Smith) is a black face in an overwhelmingly white place, and just the kind of character who ten years ago might have been little more than window dressing in a mainstream US teen drama. Here, he's granted narrative agency equal to that of his white peers, though the film can't resist defining him at least partially by his skin tone. Early on we're told that his parents are avid collectors of 'Black Santa' memorabilia – a surreal touch that nonetheless feels othering - while a later joke concerning a Confederate flag T-shirt might have played better before recent events rendered the symbol an uneasy subject for glib comedy.

Like all postmodern genre fare, Paper Towns wants to have its tropes and eat them too, and although Green's novel also embraced convention in order to critique it, the cognitive dissonance is harder to stomach here. Perhaps the problem is one of perspective: where the book's first-person narrative constantly signalled the warped outlook of an anxiety-prone 17-yearold, Q's voiceover chimes only intermittently in the film, leaving vast swathes of Paper Towns devoid of any mitigating subjectivity.

In the film's final moments, Q tracks down Margo only to have her blithely chastise him for allowing a juvenile fantasy of predestined love to take hold. She is not a puzzle to be solved, nor a cipher through which Q can find himself. It's a smart dramatic reversal, and a logical extension of the film's distaste for the reductive clichés of teen fiction, but after an hour spent wringing dramatic intrigue out of such clichés, it's also a frustrating act of adolescent doublethink. 9

Precinct Seven Five

Director: Tiller Russell Certificate 15 104m 9s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

"You get worked up telling these stories," exhales Michael Dowd, the disgraced former NYPD officer at the centre of Tiller Russell's pulsating documentary. He's not kidding: proclaimed "Dirtiest Cop Ever" by a deathless New York Post headline at the time of his arrest on countless corruption charges, Dowd is a gutter raconteur at times so intense that you fully expect Russell's lens to back away at any given moment. Yet our first glimpse of Dowd – a chastened, terse figure under cross-examination at the Mollen Commission hearings (convened in 1992 by Mayor David Dinkins to investigate widespread NYPD corruption, and originally the main focus of this film) – is markedly different. How many crimes did he commit as an officer, the panel inquires. "Hundreds," is the nonchalant reply.

Throughout this boisterous account of brazen personal and institutional malfeasance, one wonders to what extent its first-hand narrators – most visibly Dowd, his long-time partner (and eventual betrayer) Kenny Eurell and preening Dominican drug lord Adam Diaz – are being 'worked up' as they excavate the bad old days for the camera. Although Dowd and company are far less monstrous than the subjects of a documentary such as Joshua Oppenheimer's *The Act of Killing* (2012), there's a similar sense of performance in their verbal re-enactments. Dowd in particular – his vulpine features evoking a mixture of Joe Pesci and James Belushi - often seems to be auditioning to play himself in a resulting movie (in fact, a Hollywood version is in development, with Elmore Leonard specialist Scott Frank on scriptwriting duties). It makes for an uneasy watch, yet one that crackles with unsavoury energy.

Whether Precinct Seven Five cosies up a little too much to its charismatic chronicler is debatable, but it's undeniably a riveting, unblinking depiction of the Big Apple at its most rotten and of those who profited from the rot. With crisp assemblage of stark black-and-white stills, slick graphical renderings and clammy surveillance footage, Russell and editors Chad Beck and James Carroll deftly portray a mid-1980s Brooklyn crippled by crime and surging rates of crack addiction. The titular 75th precinct, located in the borough's then hugely deprived East New York district, is where Dowd used his pervasive influence to convert fellow officers into members of his corrupt crew. To be posted there, says Eurell, "would scare Clint Eastwood".

Eurell, burly and tattooed but with a haunted, hollow gaze, recalls how he initially avoided Dowd after hearing of his reputation, but later became his partner and best friend. The pair's ensuing transgressions escalated from ripping off dealers during hard-shoulder shakedowns to breaking and entering and tampering with evidence. By the time Dowd had negotiated a lucrative protection racket with coke kingpin Diaz, their modest police salaries had been boosted tenfold. Their lifestyles grew increasingly excessive, and Dowd somehow remained a skilled manipulator even after spiralling into rampant alcoholism and cocaine addiction. When Dowd's ex-wife relates her horror at his flaunting of caution by driving to work in a flashy Corvette



Dirty old town: Precinct Seven Five

financed by drug money, he amusingly retorts that he was left with no option because she had commandeered the family vehicle that day.

Diaz, a flamboyant, ribald Tony Montanalike character, cuts a chilling figure as he speaks without compunction about his special relationship with Dowd. It's clear he saw the lawman as an equal; less so Eurell, who was only tolerated because of his close friendship with Dowd. In one exchange, the latter describes how he alerted Diaz to the territorial infractions of a rival drug gang; the kingpin smirks knowingly when he denies involvement in the later disappearance of the gang's bosses. Dowd credits the cop-culture omertà of never snitching on colleagues as crucial to his criminal longevity, but it's ultimately Eurell who proves his mentor's undoing, turning informant when it becomes horribly clear that Dowd has gone way too far. In a multilayered climax that's as thrilling as anything Sidney Lumet might have put on screen, cops and criminals alike give individual accounts of events leading to Dowd's arrest. Hitherto bullish, he winces when revisiting his former friend's betrayal -"It was like being cheated on by my wife."

Russell films his interviewees in fairly conventional fashion, the exception being

a device reserved primarily for Dowd and Eurell, in which static close-ups make way for jittery handheld medium shots. These occur whenever one or both rattles off an especially sensational anecdote, giving rise to a few alarm bells: if these guys spent much of their careers lying, how much can we believe? Dowd's cursory moments of remorse are not altogether convincing, coming across more like self-pity — the glint in his eyes when animated suggests that he'd probably live it all over again.

While snippets of Dowd's pungent delivery suggest reams of dialogue from a lost James Ellroy novel, the film's significant touchstone in style, subject matter and soundtrack choices is the Scorsese of *Goodfellas* (1990) and, perhaps more pertinently, *The Wolf of Wall Street* (2013). Dowd shares a similar trajectory with those films' real-life crooks, gangster Henry Hill and rogue trader Jordan Belfort – the rise to notoriety, the profligate lifestyle, the cocaine-crazed downfall. As with Belfort and Wolf, Russell's blistering film is likely to ignite arguments over boosting the profile of those that many would no doubt rather forget. But at a time when policing failures in America are once again under the spotlight, it's a sobering reminder of the extent to which power can be exploited. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Eli Holzman Aaron Saidman Sheldon Yellen Director of Photography Igor Martinovic Editors Chad Beck James Carroll Creative Director Josh Norton Original Music Amy Marie Beauchamp José Manuel Cancela Production Sound Mixers Mike Budzik Billy Byers Jack Hutson Redd Reynolds Zack Zeller ©Waltz International Pictures, Inc. and Belfor Entertainment, LLC **Production Companies** All3media America presents in association with Belfor Entertainment a Holzman/Lambert/ Yellen production Executive Producer Stephen Lambert

In Colour

Distributor E1 Films

USA theatrical title
The Seven Five

A documentary in which former NYPD officers stationed at Brooklyn's 75th precinct during the mid-1980s and early 1990s recall how they repeatedly broke the law in order to lead lifestyles of lavish wealth and excess. Ringleader Michael Dowd, his ex-partner Kenny Eurell and others tell

how their transgressions escalated from petty theft to racketeering schemes and lucrative alliances with local drug barons. Additional interviews with federal and internal affairs officials detail how Dowd was eventually caught and sent to prison after Eurell informed on him.

President

United Kingdom/Georgia/France/ Germany/Republic of Korea 2014 Director: Mohsen Makhmalbaf

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

'How the mighty have fallen' is the not-soburied subtext of Mohsen Makhmalbaf's latest film; unfortunately, the maxim applies to the director as well as to his protagonist. This laboured fable about a deposed dictator desperately hiding himself among the populace he once held securely under his thumb is the most didactic movie to date from a filmmaker whose greatest works - such as Salaam Cinema (1995) and A Moment of *Innocence* (1996) – have always integrated political commentary with a beguiling, often playful self-reflexivity. There's no such complexity in *President*, which feels conventional from an opening title card informing us that the action is set in "an unknown country" – the go-to backdrop for artists striving for universal significance.

The real-life location here is Georgia, and certainly the title character looks as if he's just stepped out from behind the Iron Curtain: white-haired and resplendent in military uniform, the reigning (and once again pointedly unnamed) head of state (Misha Gomiashvili) is like a parodic avatar of authoritarianism. Makhmalbaf doesn't waste time undermining him: in the first scene, the President is playing a game with his young grandson (Dachi Orvelashvili), allowing the boy to control the capital's power grid. But it soon becomes clear that the city has in fact been plunged into darkness by insurgents bent on toppling his oppressive regime. He's lost control.

As set-ups go, this overture falls somewhere between ominous and obvious. Unfortunately, Makhmalbaf's staging keeps slacking into the latter category as things go on. An extended sequence in which the presidential limousine is attacked by a horde of protesters en route to the airport is credibly chaotic, and the young boy's obliviousness to his grandfather's misdeeds - and his own status as a figurehead of ill-gotten privilege – is nicely emphasised by his enclosure in the back of a speeding, bulletproof vehicle. At the same time, it feels as if Makhmalbaf is using imagery of modern political revolution – and poverty and violence so diagrammatically that it overrides any sense of drama. This isn't a story: it's a lesson.

Once the President and his grandson have been separated from their motorcade and forced to disguise themselves as peasants to avoid the well-armed militiamen out for their blood, it's apparent that the film is going to be a picaresque tour of a collapsing society - one littered with enough brutally diverting details and dangers to stave off boredom and yet vague enough to stand in for everywhere at once. The supporting characters include a humble barber who standsin for the citizens who've grown accustomed to meager lives, a loquacious middle-aged prostitute who happens to have serviced the President once upon a time, and other downtrodden, displaced civilians who exist only to reflect the protagonist's crimes instead of having any credible life force of their own.

Such are the drawbacks of making such an obviously allegorical film. The visual symbols employed by Makhmalbaf to put across his points about the sins of the ruling



Higher power: Misha Gomiashvili

class and the revolutionaries alike are similarly overbearing: a row of burning presidential portraits here, a hapless flock of sheep there. (He even resorts at one point to a sandcastle being washed away by the surf.) It's hard to take issue with much of what the film says, which is that a country ruled by top-down ideology will eventually start to rot from the

bottom up, and it's not as if Makhmalbaf, who left Iran after the 2009 election to work in selfimposed exile, isn't invested in his material. There's no doubt that President is earnest and anguished. But noble goals rarely excuse weak execution, and this is precisely the sort of well-made and inherently wearisome film that gives good intentions a bad name. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Maysam Makhmalbaf Mike Downey Sam Taylor Vladimer Katcharava Scriptwriters Mohsen Makhmalbaf Marziveh Meshkiny **Photography** Konstantin Mindia Esadze Hana Makhmalbaf Marziyeh Meshkiny **Production Design**

Music Guja Burduli Dietrich Strause Daler Nazarov Kvicha Maglakelidze Sound Recorder Nika Paniashvili Ketevan Kalandadze

@Mohsen Makhmalbaf Production Productions Makhmalbaf Film

An unknown country, present day. The President is

his family to the airport so that they can flee, the

President is about to return to the capital with his

and his aide is killed. The vehicle runs out of fuel on

the outskirts of the city and the President and his

grandson when his limousine is attacked by protesters

grandson begin to wander the landscape; he solicits a

haircut at gunpoint from a rural barber and disguises

himself as a travelling musician to evade capture by

comfortably ensconced in his palace, but out on the streets a revolution is in progress. After accompanying

House Productions, President Fame Limited, 20 Steps Productions Produced in association with Creativity Capital In co-production with BAC Films Production Brummer und Herzog Filmproduktion Recipient of Asian Project Market support from Busan Internationa Film Festival Supported by

of the Georgian National Film Centre Cast grandson

Misha Gomiashvili Dachi Orvelashvil Guja Burduli political prisoner. sınger Ia Sukhitashvili prostitute

Eurimages Supported by the

financial support

Lasha Ramishvili Soso Khvedelidze political prisoner, love Dato Beshitaishvili political prisoner. Eka Kakhiani Nuki Koshkelishvili older daughter Elene Bezarashvili

Zura Begalishvili

[1.85:1] Subtitles Distributor Swipe Films UK publicity title The President younger daughter Tekla Javakhadze

Davit Dvalishvili

In Colour

militiamen and civilians hoping for a valuable cash reward. Eventually, the old man and the boy fall in with a group of refugees who don't recognise them; one confesses to helping to kill the President's son and daughter-in-law in a terrorist act. The President is enraged but does not reveal himself; he finds a telephone and makes plans to be picked up at the seaside. A man recognises him, and an angry mob plans to hang both the President and his grandson. The boy is spared, however, and the people in the crowd argue over the best method of punishment as the tide rolls in.

Pressure

United Kingdom 2015 Director: Ron Scalpello Certificate 15 91m 14s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"We are a four-man saturation diving team in a bell," says faith-ruled family man Mitchell (Matthew Goode) into the radio, hoping that someone will heed his call for help. On the floor of the Somali Basin to weld a damaged oil pipe, Mitchell and his crew – gruff, professional Engel (Danny Huston), arthritic, alcoholic Hurst (Alan McKenna) and young, inexperienced Jones (Joe Cole, who also starred in director Ron Scalpello's 2012 feature debut Offender) – realise that a perfect storm above has sunk their support ship, leaving them 670ft under and utterly alone.

The deep-sea-diving disaster movie is something of a 'sub' genre, with James Cameron's The Abyss (1989) and Barry Levinson's Sphere (1998) bringing extraterrestrials and fantasy to the underwater setting, while Tristan de Vere Cole's *Dykket* (1989) and Erik Skjoldbjaerg's *Pioneer*(2013) are anchored, like *Pressure*, to the more realist milieu of oil exploration and transport. What Scalpello adds to this tradition is the claustrophobic thrill associated with films that trap individuals (and us with them) for most of the duration in lifts (Abwärts, 1984; Blackout, 2008; Devil, 2010; Elevator, 2011), saunas (247F, 2011), funiculars (Frozen, 2010) or even coffins (Buried, 2010). Once the diving bell has descended in the film's opening minutes, Pressure stays underwater till the bitter end, in and around a fragile vessel. The spaces inside - essentially two small rooms - are creaky and confining, while external shots of the vessel, its lights flickering in the darkness, merely enhance the sense of vulnerability and desolation. Our only departure from these environments is the occasional impressionistic cutaway to a woman (Daisy Lowe) in a car's passenger seat, and a young boy – but the story behind this memory, which haunts Engel, turns out also to involve a sink-or-swim scenario in deep waters. Even Jones's dreams offer no escape, as his wife (Gemita Samarra), figured as a naked mermaid, entwines him in her suffocating embrace just



Hard dive: Danny Huston

The Second Mother

Brazil 2014 Director: Anna Muvlaert

outside the bell, in a siren's call of love and death.

Phrases such as 'in deep water' and 'lost at sea' carry an obvious metaphorical connotation along with their more literal meaning - and when Jones declares, "You're gonna die anyway, what's the difference, here or in the water?" his question speaks to broader existential concerns. Within the womb-like bell, with its lifeline to ship and crew expressly called (and resembling) an 'umbilical', these men (some fathers, one a father-to-be) discuss childbirth – and hope themselves to be reborn – even as birth's opposite bears down on them. In between these two states, they express their wishes, fears and disappointments in life, and, through their actions, define themselves. It is potentially a simple, sparse set-up, pregnant with thematic resonance – although the decision to introduce the film first with information (in text form) on deep-sea oil pipelines and decompression, and then with Engel's grimly poetic voiceover on the lure of the sea, betrays an overstated style of filmmaking that threatens to delimit the infinite and drown any subtlety. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Jason Newmark Laurie Cook Written by Paul Staheli Story Louis Baxter Director of Photography Richard Mott **Editors** Jake Roberts Johnny Rayner Production Designer Greg Shaw Music Benjamin Wallfisch Production Sound Mixe

Ion Thomas

Lindsay Pugh

Costume Design

©Pinewood Films No. 8 Limited Production Companies Isle of Man Film and Pinewood Pictures present in association with Embankment Films a Bigscope Films production Executive **Producers** Steve Christian Ivan Dunleavy Hugo Grumbai Tim Haslam Ed Fraiman

Cast Danny Huston Engel Matthew Goode

Adam Nagel

Joe Cole Alan McKenna Daisy Lowe Emily Lou Gemita Samarra Lisa

T1.85:11

Distributor Pinewood Pictures

The Somali Basin, present day. Mitchell, Engel, Hurst and Jones are lowered 670ft in a diving bell to fix a damaged oil pipeline. A storm above sinks their support ship. The four manage to make brief contact with a stricken Chinese fishing vessel. After nearly killing Mitchell in a diving accident, Hurst heads out to look for the ship's oxygen canisters, and succumbs to hypothermia. Tipped off by the Chinese vessel, a navy frigate commander makes contact, but needs time to find the men's location. He also confirms Engel's suspicions that their company Vaxxilon has washed its hands of them. Engel has to be resuscitated after successfully searching for more oxygen along the pipeline. The men try floating the bell, even at the risk of crushing their own transport - but the umbilical snags on the bottom, suspending them 170ft beneath the surface. Mitchell swims out to float the signal beacon but, stung by jellyfish, releases it too early, and drowns in a selfsacrificing effort to switch it on. Haunted by failing to save a father and son in a previous accident, Engel insists that father-to-be Jones take the remaining diving hat and attempt the swim to the surface after the bell has been partially decompressed and flooded. Jones heads painfully to the surface under Engel's intercom guidance, and is picked up by a navy rescue boat. Clutching the necklace of his late fiancée. Engel swims out and drowns.

Reviewed by Maria Delgado

The tensions in the life of the enterprising and affectionate housekeeper-cum-nanny protagonist of Anna Muylaert's accomplished The Second Mother are identified from the very opening of the film. She is watching over the small son of her employers by the family pool while talking to her absent daughter on the phone. The matronly Val is identified as the child Fabinho's second mother as he plainly asks "What time she will return?" – *que horas ela volta?*, the film's original Brazilian title. It's a telling question that is picked up when we next see the household over a decade later. It refers to the now adolescent Fabinho's busy professional mother Bárbara, but it resonates with Val and even, during the course of the film, with Val's daughter Jéssica and the latter's own relationship with her baby son. Indeed, Muylaert's film functions by skilfully crafting a web of parallel situations between the different parent-child pairings across a lean, adroit narrative charting the disruption that ensues when the clever, motivated Jéssica becomes a cuckoo in the middle-class family's nest.

Displaced family relationships abound. Val comforts Fabinho on numerous occasions, while it is to Carlos, Fabinho's 'arty' father, that Jéssica gravitates. Val offers Fabinho physical affection, while Carlos provides Jéssica with the books and conversations about architecture that she craves. However, Lourenço Mutarelli's Carlos is an infantilised adult – with a languid lack of purpose that his son has evidently inherited.

Muylaert's feature suggests a great deal about the household's attitudes to class through the deployment of a number of visual motifs that slyly comment on the wider issues of privilege underpinning Brazilian society: Fabinho's favourite ice cream, which Jéssica takes when her mother isn't looking, much to Bárbara's annoyance; the mobile phones that the wealthy family play with at the dinner table as they evade direct conversation; the swimming pool that Bárbara tellingly declares out of bounds because she supposedly



Class divisions: Regina Casé, Michel Joelsas

spots a rat in it soon after Jéssica uses it.

The Second Mother impressively avoids delivering judgements on characters that could all too easily have become clichéd stereotypes. Karine Teles's modish Bárbara is driven by a sense of purpose and energy that suggests clear analogies with Val. Both have fixed ideas about what they see as socially acceptable. Both share a demanding work ethic: Bárbara is interviewed at home for a television item about successful professionals; Val is seldom seen standing still or sitting – if not doing household chores, she is walking the dog, guiding the more hapless maid Edna or finding time for Fabinho. There is a wonderful warmth to Brazilian star Regina Casé's performance as Val. A wide, toothy smile, slightly hoarse voice and good humour render her an endearing figure. Casé expertly conveys both Val's excitement at Jéssica's arrival and her frustration as maternal loyalties are challenged by her daughter's refusal to unquestioningly accept her value system.

The film deftly exposes the sidelining of Val by the supposedly liberal and progressive family she dutifully serves, but in Fabinho's easy relationship with Jéssica, the latter's spectacular triumph in the university entrance exam and Val's crucial decision at the end of the film, *The Second Mother* concludes on an optimistic note that suggests change is imminent. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Caio Gullane Fabiano Gullane Débora Ivanov Anna Muylaert Written by Anna Muylaert Director of **Photography** Barbara Alvarez Editor Karen Harley **Art Directors** Marcos Pedroso

Thales Junqueira Music Fábio Trummer Vitor Araujo Direct Sound Gabriela Cunha Costumes André Simonetti Cláudia Kopke

@Gullane/África Production Companies Ancine, ProacSP. Governo do estado São Paulo, Prefeitura de São Paulo Cultura, Fomento Cinema Besni, BB DTVM, Avon, Sabesp present a Gullane production in association with África filmes in co-production with Globo Filmes Supported with funds from Ancine - the National Film Agency

Muvlaert Made with the support of Governo do estado São Paul, Ancine Sponsor: Prefeitura de São Paulo Cultura, Fomento Cinema, Besni **Executive Producers** Caio Gullane Claudia Büschel

A film by Anna

Cast Regina Casé Camila Márdila Jéssica Karine Teles Bárhara Lourenço Mutarelli Carlos Michel Joelsas Fabinho Helena Albergaria Edna

In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Soda Pictures

Brazilian theatrical title Que horas ela volta?

São Paolo, the present. Val is housekeeper in the home of wealthy professionals Carlos and Bárbara. She takes care of their son Fabinho, who is preparing for his university entrance exams. When Val's daughter Jéssica arrives in the city to sit the entrance exam for the same university in the hope of studying architecture, she stays in the family home but is unhappy at sharing Val's tiny room and secures an invitation from Carlos to move into the larger guest room. Jéssica is not prepared to respect the rigid class boundaries that her mother observes: she eats with the family and swims in the

pool with Fabinho and his friends. Val is increasingly disturbed by what she sees as her daughter's lack of social propriety, and plans are made for Jéssica to find alternative accommodation. Jéssica receives a marriage proposal from Carlos, who then claims it is a joke; Bárbara asks Jéssica to vacate the guest room. Fabinho fails the entrance exam while Jéssica scores an unusually high grade. Fabinho goes to study in Australia. Val resigns her job and moves in with Jéssica, offering to take care of the baby boy her daughter has left behind to come and study in São Paulo.

Self/less

USA 2015 Director: Tarsem Singh Certificate 12A 116m 47s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Joel Schumacher's Falling Down (1993) took the essence of Frank Perry's The Swimmer (1968) – a haunting fable about middle-aged, middle-class disillusion – and turned it into an action movie with a high body count and an angry cartoon version of the world that justified its protagonist's unattractive self-pity. Tarsem Singh's Self/less does the same for John Frankenheimer's equally allusive and melancholy Seconds (1966), which was based on a novel by David Ely. In that film, pudgy, unfamiliar John Randolph was reborn as the era's icon of unattached manhood Rock Hudson... now, Ben Kingsley leaves a literally gilded New York apartment to be brain-switched and wake up as Ryan Reynolds. Always a likeable leading man, Reynolds doesn't incarnate the universally enviable status of Hudson in 1966and he can't be expected to match a performance informed by what were then subliminal signifiers of the gay actor's real-life discomfort with his screen image, which made the reborn playboy the most personal, most affecting role he ever took.

The script, by Spanish duo David and Alex Pastor, who have already reconfigured The Exterminating Angel (1962) as an apocalypse movie in *The Last Days* (2013), skips through the premise of an ageing man submitting to a radical scientific procedure so that he can be reborn in the prime of life with a fantasy playboy lifestyle of available designer women and muscle cars. The meat of the movie is the Bourne-lite business of having Kingsley's business-building brain in Reynolds's US Marine killing-machine body taking on a shadowy cabal of besuited (and reborn) hitmen in order to bring down a conspiracy run out of a supervillain lair (an abandoned warehouse full of decaying carnival floats) by a smooth, British-accented mad scientist played in Watchmen mode by Matthew Goode.

Singh rather surprisingly tones down the imaginative flights that have made his hit-andmiss filmography (*The Cell, The Fall, Immortals*) refreshingly demented. Aside from some wobbly mirror tricks – and a moment when a villain mistakes the effects of a flamethrower on a



New flesh: Ryan Reynolds

shatterproof one-way mirror for the beginnings of a hallucination – this aspires to look like a generic action movie married with soap-opera content as the multiple-personality protagonist reunites with family and friends from both of his lives in token emotional beats. Along the way there are a few tiny, effective moments... covered mirrors and a hidden playroom that hints at the secret shame of Hale's closest ally, paying off on an early throwaway line about a dead child.

As might be expected from a film that thanks Donald Trump for lending the production his tower, the very wealthy are oddly indulged here, and there's no sense at all of the way real people live. Hale has to be conned into undergoing rejuvenation by being told that the process is victimless, and – for a supposedly ruthless tycoon and political fixer – is gifted with a do-the-right-thing conscience that allows Mark an unearned happy ending. Whether Bitwell's wife Madeline and her cheerful moppet would actually want to be abstracted from their community and stranded on a tiny island idyll to enjoy the sort of perpetually frozen, monied life the finale bestows on them is a question no one even raises. §

Southpaw

Director: Antoine Fuqua Certificate 15 123m 32s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

Southpaw, another sports drama about a flamingout success who regains integrity (and money) by seriously dedicating himself to his craft, makes more sense in its original conception, as a boxing drama meant to mirror the "struggles" - writer Kurt Sutter's word – undergone by Eminem. These probably include the 2006 death of the rapper's childhood friend/D12 posse member Proof at a nightclub, which finds its analogue here when Maureen (Rachel McAdams), wife of professionally undefeated boxer Billy Hope (Jake Gyllenhaal), is shot and killed during a needlessly belligerent confrontation between her husband and Miguel Escobar (Miguel Gomez), a young boxer hoping to goad the 43-0 champ into a title match with him.

Gyllenhaal delivers a mostly stereotypically category-checking version of an 'Oscar performance': in his grief and wrath, Hope flips over tables, punches mirrors, weeps. Bottoming out in booze, drugs and potential bankruptcy, reckless Hope (!) signs a boxing contract he shouldn't with long-time manager Jordan Mains (50 Cent – who, ironically, has himself recently filed for bankruptcy). Whatever the script's faults, director Antoine Fuqua's inability to mediate greatly worsens such already clunky moments: it's heavily hinted in dialogue that Mains is untrustworthy, and including a shot of him literally licking his lips in greedy anticipation as Hope signs is sheer overkill. There follows Hope's ringside pummelling, loss of custody of his daughter, coaching by wizened boxing sage Tick Wills (Forest Whitaker) and return to glory, all at more or less the exact moments you might anticipate, complete with an unabashedly unreconstructed training montage.

Whatever metaphorical crash and rebirth Sutter envisioned as mirroring Eminem's personal tribulations and brief mid-career musical hiatus are lost in Gyllenhaal's performance - the rapper's presence is felt on the soundtrack but not in front of the camera. That's not the actor's fault: Gyllenhaal is coming off a trio of dramas that have called for ambitiously oversized performances, allowing for oddly timed laughs, strange gaps in his line delivery and a general fidgetiness. This helped elevate the essentially indigestible nature of Prisoners, but the staid script for Southpaw defeats him. Perhaps that's because in his most recent showcase parts (including Enemy and Nightcrawler), Gyllenhaal's showboating highlighted and externalised moments of extreme internal contradiction or tension within his characters. But starting from his last name, the character of Billy Hope has no contradictions between how he behaves and what he thinks or feels. He's a purely physical person who's slow to verbal articulacy, and there's no real room for Gyllenhaal's offbeat deliveries. Instead, he screams into the camera in extreme slo-mo, dripping sweat and blood on to the camera lens.

Fuqua and DP Mauro Fiore do a decent if unexciting job of keeping the action within the ring legible. Everything else is jumbled or worse: note that the final fight is literally Hope vs Escobar – ie, our better angels versus a randomly violent schmuck whose name's primary connotation for most viewers will be the drug

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Ram Bergman Peter Schlesse Written by Alex Pasto David Pastor Director of Photography Brendan Galvin Editor Robert Duffy **Production Designe** Tom Foden Music Antonio Pinto Production Sound Mixer Pud Cusack

Shay Cunliffe

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LLC and Shedding
Distribution, LLC
Production
Companies
Focus Features

Costume Designer

and Endgame
Entertainment
present in association
with FilmNation
Entertainment a Ram
Bergman production
ATarsem Singh film
Executive Producers
Julie Goldstein
Dave Pomier
Lia Buman

Cast
Ryan Reynolds
young Damian Hale/
Edward Kidner/
Mark Bitwell
Natalie Martinez
Madeline
Matthew Goode
Albright
Victor Garber
Martin
Derek Luke
Anton
Michelle Dockery

Claire

Ben Kingsley Damian Hale Melora Hardin Judy Brendan McCarthy Anton 2 Sam Page Carl

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

New York, present day. Dying tycoon Damian Hale learns of a service offered by Dr Albright to have his consciousness transferred to a young, healthy, labgrown replacement. Albright arranges for Hale to 'die' and be reborn as a young man called Edward Kidner, who is set up with a hedonistic lifestyle in New Orleans. Befriended by playboy Anton, Hale throws himself into his new life – though he needs to take daily medication to control hallucinations, which he eventually realises are memories. Tracking the site of one of these memories, Hale discovers that his new body wasn't lab-grown but once belonged to soldier Mark Bitwell, who sold himself so that his daughter could have a life-saving operation. Hale shocks Madeline, Mark's wife, and is then pursued by Albright's henchmen - led by Anton, in several bodies - as he tries to escape. He tracks Albright to his secret headquarters and, using Mark's military skills, destroys the process and kills the scientist. After reconciling with his daughter Claire, Hale stops taking the memory-suppressing pills and Mark's consciousness takes over his body. Mark reunites with Madeline and his daughter on an island retreat bought with Hale's money.



Rachel McAdams, Jake Gyllenhaal

lord. Hope's relationship with his daughter Leila (Oona Laurence) is a three-part arc: first she loves him, then she yells "I hate you" and then she loves him again. That's both the essence and texture of their interactions, which never go beyond sketching out the gesture of a father-daughter story. An extreme example of insultingly sloppy writing: predictably, coach Wills initially wants nothing to do with Hope, but then a minor character - a young boy who trains in the gym - is abruptly killed after a brief premonition of trouble. He dies to solve a script problem: how to give these men parallel reasons to want to help each other. The plot beats must be hit on time, and Southpaw plods dutifully through them. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Todd Black Jason Blumenthal Steve Tisch Peter Riche Alan Riche Antoine Fugua Jerry Ye Written by Kurt Sutter Director of Photography Mauro Fiore Edited by John Refoua Production Designer Derek R. Hill James Horner Sound Mixer Ed Novick Costume Designer David Robinson Stunt Co-ordinato John Cenatiempo

Production Companies The Weinstein Company and Wanda Pictures present

a Richie production in association with Escape Artists and Figua Films An Antoine Fugua film Executive **Producers** Bob Weinsteir Harvey Weinstein Gillian Zhao Cary Cheng Jonathan Garrison Kurt Sutter David Bloomfield David Ranes Dylan Sellers Ezra Swerdlow Paul Rosenberg Stuart Parr

Cast Jake Gyllenhaal Billy Hope Forest Whitaker Titus Wills 'Tick Angela Rivera Curtis '50 Cent Jackson

David Schiff

Jordan Mains Oona Laurence Leila Hope Rachel McAdams Maureen Hope Miguel Gomez Miguel Escobar

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

Distributor Entertainment Film Distributors Ltd

New York, the present. After winning his 43rd undefeated match, boxer Billy Hope is urged by wife Maureen to retire before he is permanently affected by his injuries. At a charity dinner, Hope is taunted by boxer Miguel Escobar, who hopes to goad him into agreeing to a match. In the subsequent scuffle, Maureen is shot by one of Miguel's posse and dies. Billy hits rock bottom, losing his house, his assets and custody of his child. In need of work to prove his fitness as a custodial parent, Billy gets a job at coach Tick Wills's boxing gym, eventually convincing Wills to train him. After a successful exhibition match and regaining custody of his daughter, Billy fights Escobar and wins back his championship title.

Strange Magic

USA 2014 Director: Garv Rvdstrom Certificate U 99m 15s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

One of the paradoxes of George Lucas's immensely influential career is how often his commercial judgement has failed him. His rare non-Star Wars projects since 1994 have been infamous failures on a lavish scale: the screwballcomedy homage Radioland Murders, the WWII black-pilots drama Red Tails and now animated musical Strange Magic. Already considered a bomb, it has the unwelcome distinction of selling fewer tickets on its opening weekend than any animated film released to 3,000-plus screens.

As hinted by the ELO-appropriated title, Strange Magic's narrative is largely advanced through a reasonably esoteric selection of popular songs, personally chosen by Lucas. The theme is announced bluntly by the narrator in the opening sequence, which establishes that the Fairy Kingdom and the Dark Forest are divided by a wall of primroses, whose petals can be made into a love potion. It's a good thing, says the narrator: "After all, everybody deserves to be loved." This is a lesson that fairy princess Marianne (voiced by Evan Rachel Wood) has failed to learn: after breaking up with her cheating fiancé Roland (Sam Palladio), she's an embittered, sword-wielding swashbuckler devoted to the single life. The plot pivots around power-hungry Roland's attempts to regain her hand by getting the Sugar Plum Fairy (Kristin Chenoweth) – long imprisoned by the amour-hating, freaky-looking Bog King (Alan Cumming) – to make him the potion. Circumstance brings Marianne and the Bog King together; both once burned by romance, they find themselves in improbable, duet-singing love.

Like Radioland and Red Tails, Strange Magic is a long-nurtured (15 years) project for Lucas, who wrote the story (its potion device inspired by A Midsummer Night's Dream) and executive produced. Serviceable animation was provided by Lucasfilm Animation Singapore, a division of the now Disney-owned empire that mainly cranks out Star Wars-related work for TV. The director is Gary Rydstrom, a Lucasfilm employee since 1983, who is known for his considerable achievements in sound design (creating the dinosaur audio for Jurassic Park etc) and whose only previous directorial experience was on two animated shorts.

Regardless of who was in charge, it'd be hard to get around the violence done to the songs



Bog standard: Strange Magic

ostensibly being celebrated. The arrangements are by Marius de Vries, who provided a similar anti-service for Moulin Rouge! (2001) and whose garish work here approaches cultural vandalism. The general sonic approach is made clear in a dreadful opening version of 'Fools Rush In', rendered with Broadway strings and a strummy acoustic guitar out of the Jack Johnson playbook. The song has also been reconfigured as a romantic duet, a restructuring tack taken throughout. Another tactic is for characters to respond to lyrics on a line-by-line basis – for example, an infuriated Marianne retorting to Roland's plea "Say you understand" (from 'C'mon Marianne', naturally) with "Only too well." The effect is less of popular material being reimagined than of angry drunks heckling a jukebox.

The animation is stronger on motion than character design, and the moral is made explicitly clear by Marianne's father (Alfred Molina) in almost self-parodying terms at the film's end: "Well boys, I've learnt a valuable lesson. Never judge somebody by how they, or he, or she, look." It doesn't take much to imagine the 'love potion' as a not-so-subtle metaphor for date-rape drugs, but it's at least amusing that its random deployment by a spirited, bat-like creature (credited as 'Imp') results in various members of the animal kingdom falling in love with each other, as if the film were earnestly advocating pan-sexual bestiality (or simply presenting a gay-marriage metaphor). But there's nothing so deliberately radical in this effort, which for all its semi-idiosyncratically misguided song choices is representative of the worst of family CGI entertainment. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Mark S. Miller **Screenplay** David Berenbaum Irene Mecchi Gary Rydstrom Story George Lucas Editor Chris Plummer **Art Direction** Simon Murton

Marius de Vries Sound Designe E.J. Holowicki Animation Supervisor Kim Ooi

Production **Companies** Touchstone Pictures present a Lucasfilm

The Fairy Kingdom and the Dark Forest are divided by a wall of primroses, whose petals can be used by the Sugar Plum Fairy to make a love potion. Adamantly opposed to love, the Dark Forest's Bog King makes sure that the primroses are regularly decapitated. After discovering her fiancé Roland cheating on her, fairy princess Marianne breaks off their engagement.

Elijah Kelley **Executive Producers** Meredith Anne Bull Sam Palladio Kristin Chenoweth

Sugar Plum Fairy Maya Rudolph

Alfred Molina

Fairy King

Voice Cast Alan Cumming Evan Rachel Wood

production

George Lucas Kiri Hart

Jason McGatlin

Bob Einstein Stuff Peter Storman Kevin Michael Richardson Brutus Llou Johnson Pare

Brenda Chapman imp

Dolby Atmos F2.35:11

Distributor Buena Vista International (UK)

Determined to regain Marianne's hand so that he can ascend to power, Roland convinces her friend Sunny to get Sugar Plum - imprisoned by the Bog King - to make a love potion. When the Bog King learns of this, he kidnaps Marianne's sister Dawn and demands that the potion be destroyed. Marianne flies to the Dark Forest to rescue her sister and falls in love with the Bog King.

Terminator Genisys

USA 2015 Director: Alan Taylor Certificate 12A 125m 32s

Reviewed by Mark Fisher

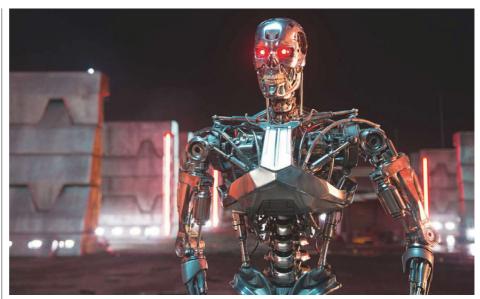
Think Abbott and Costello Meet Terminator. Think Terminator & Robin. Think, in other words, the point at which a franchise subsides, perhaps finally, into self-parody.

If 2009's underrated *Terminator Salvation* drew on — and extended — all the machinic darkness of the first film, then *Terminator Genisys* returns to the playful postmodernism of *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (1991). Indeed, the film is so mired in self-reference and in-jokes that you almost suspect its writers and director must have been closely consulting Fredric Jameson's remarks on pastiche in *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism.*

In retrospect, Terminator 2's already irritating combination of cutesy smart alecry ("Hasta la vista, baby") and apocalyptic foreboding laid out the formula for the 90s postmodern thriller in the same way that the Bond films did for the thrillers of the 60s. The form was a kind of have-your-cake-and-eat-it mix of send-up and portentous melodrama (Linda Hamilton's performance so OTT that you wanted to say, "Chill out, it's just a nuclear apocalypse"). That shtick feels played out far past the point of exhaustion now, and Terminator Genisys goes even more lightweight. It acts as if Terminator Salvation had never happened, emphatically rejecting its style and tone, and gorging on all the time-travel paradoxes that the previous film had sidelined.

The set-up returns us to the scenario of the first film. It sees Kyle Reese sent back into 1984 from the future. But Kyle meets a Sarah Connor who is not at all what he expected. Rather than the disbelieving naïf who has to be traumatically persuaded that she will become the mother of humanity's future saviour, this already battlehardened Connor knows more than Kyle does. Aha, an alternative timeline: an excuse to run through so many remixed versions of the bestknown sequences from the first two films, like so much microwave-reheated comfort food. By this point, we've already seen the original 1984 model of the Arnie Terminator blown away by an older Terminator. This Terminator – whom Connor calls Pops - is essentially an older version of the protective-patriarch Terminator of Terminator 2 but - you see - he always talks in very technical jargon, which makes for some deeply unfunny would-be humorous exchanges with Kyle, who keeps asking if there is a switch he can use to turn this dialogue off.

The presiding metaphysic here – a vision of total plasticity, in which nothing is final, everything can be redone – is, like all else in this film, completely familiar. If the Terminator in the first film - a muscle-bound humanoid with metallic-robotic skeleton – was an image of work and technology in the Fordist era, then the T-1000 gave us our first taste of the forms of capital and labour that were then emerging. No doubt, the T-1000's protean capacity to adopt any form whatsoever initially seemed exciting - reflecting the promises of new digital technologies and an unleashed capitalism, recently freed up from conflict with the Soviet empire. But by 2015, that excitement has long since flatlined. As with so much contemporary culture, Terminator Genisys feels simultaneously



Time bandit: Terminator Genisys

self-satisfied and desperate, frenzied and boring. It is at one and the same time a desecration and a plundering of the series' past that is also pathetically reverential towards it. This sense of decadence makes the *Batman & Robin* parallel inevitable – with Arnie's Pops uncomfortably recalling his disastrous performance as Mr Freeze. It isn't only the presence of Matt Smith that makes one think of the smugly baroque narrative excrescences of recent *Dr Who*.

In the end, however, what *Terminator Genisys* most resembles is something like a cross between the *Back to the Future* movies and *The Butterfly Effect*, but with none of the wit and ingenuity of the former and little of the grim fatalism of the latter. In fact, it is the film's absolute refusal of fatalism – its embracing, indeed, of a kind of radically open reality, in which nothing is fixed, everything can be redone – that gives *Terminator Genisus* its affectless quality. The uncanny charge

of the first film's time loop – in which characters perform, apparently for the first time, acts that in some sense have always-already happened, is dissipated. No time loops here, just fuzzy and flabby spirals, which trail off into inconsequence, and which might very well be incoherent, if you could be bothered to care about them. But this is the problem – a film whose reality is *this* plastic, this recomposable, is simply impossible to care about on any level. As such, Terminator Genisys becomes a kind of dumb, unintentional parable about restructuring in late capitalism. Since anything can and will change soon, why bother to care about what is happening now? The whole film feels like a monument to pointless hard work. We're left somewhat stupefied and perturbed by the vast amount of digital labour that has gone into something which is almost completely devoid of interest, and which certainly feels like very hard work to watch. 9

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by David Ellison Dana Goldberg Screenplay Laeta Kalogridis Patrick Lussier Director of **Photography** Kramer Morgenthau Editor Roger Barton **Production Designer** Neil Spisal Lorne Balfe Sound Mixe Pud Cusak Costume Designe Susan Matheso Visual Effects Double Negative MPC Lola Stewart VFX One of Us Method Studios Visual Effects & Animation by Industrial Light

& Magic

Stunt Co-ordinato

John Stoneham Jr

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Corporation
Production
Companies
Paramount Pictures
and Skydance
Productions present a
Skydance production
With the participation
of The Canadian
Film Production
Services Tax Credit
Executive Producers
Bill Carraro
Laeta Kalogridis
Patrick Lussier

Cast Arnold Schwarzenegger T-800 Terminator/T-800 guardian, 'Pops' Jason Clarke John Connor Emilia Clarke Jai Courtney
Kyle Reese
JJK. Simmons
O'Brien
Dayo Okenyi
Danny Dyson
Matthew Smith
[i.e. Matt Smith]
Alex
Courtney B. Vance
Miles Dyson
Michael Gladis
Lieutenant Matias
Sandrine Holt
Detective Cheung
Byung-hun Lee
T-1000, 'cop'

Sarah Connor

Dolby Digital/ Datasat/Dolby Atmos In Colour [2.35:1]

Some screening presented in 3D

Distributor Paramount Pictures UK John Connor, leader of the human resistance against the artificial intelligence Skynet, sends his close ally and friend Kyle Reese back to 1984 to protect his mother, Sarah Connor, from being killed by one of Skynet's Terminators. But the 1984 to which Kyle returns is not the one Kyle expects. In this alternative 1984, Sarah already knows about Skynet, Judgement Day (when Skynet launches a nuclear attack to destroy the human population) and the future war in which her son will play a central role. She is accompanied by a Terminator she affectionately refers to as 'Pops', who has been her protector since she was a child. Meanwhile Kyle is troubled by memories, seemingly from an alternative timeline in which Judgement Day doesn't happen in 1997 but in 2017. In this scenario, Judgement Day will be brought about by Genisys, a system that promises to integrate all social media and computer applications. Kyle and Sarah timetravel to 2017, seeking to prevent Genisys coming online. They find that John Connor is already waiting in 2017 but is now a cyborg, working for Skynet. After a long struggle, Kyle, Sarah and Pops defeat him, using the magnetic field of the time machine. The three then travel back to Kyle's childhood home, and he warns his younger self about Genisys.

Theeb

Jordan/United Kingdom/United Arab Emirates/Qatar/ Switzerland 2013 Director: Naji Abu Nowar

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

The feature debut of British-born Jordanian Naji Abu Nowar, Theeb is described by its director as a "Bedouin western" - which is fine as far as it goes. But there's a freshness and an integrity to the treatment that make it more than a spinoff of an existing genre. (It could also be regarded as a footnote to Lawrence of Arabia, but that's probably the least interesting aspect of it.) Nothing is spelled out for us: it's possible to deduce, from internal evidence, broadly where and when we are, but there are no helpful signposts in the form of captions or chunks of expository dialogue. Much of the background to the plot comes to us in snatches of half-overheard conversation picked up by the film's protagonist, young Theeb (the name means 'wolf' in Arabic), through whose alert but often uncomprehending perception all the action is filtered.

As the boy, Jacir Eid gives a strikingly eloquent performance. Not in terms of words, as he has relatively little dialogue; but his face, and in particular his dark expressive eyes, narrowed in perplexity or wide with alarm, tell us at every moment just what he's thinking. Like virtually all the cast, he has never acted before; only Jack Fox (son of actor James Fox), as the British officer who comes seeking help, has previous screen experience. Otherwise, all the roles are taken by non-professionals, desert-dwelling Bedouin from Jordan operating in what's very much their own territory; the dialogue was devised by Nowar and his co-screenwriter Bassel Ghandour, in close consultation with their cast. (As Ghandour recalls, "They understood subtext, and nuances and subtleties. By the end of it, Naji and I were just writing and listening.") The result is a sense of unforced authenticity: the actors behave with no sense of self-consciousness, and only the Englishman seems awkward and out of place - but then, given the circumstances, that too feels authentic.

The wellspring of the plot stems from the Bedouin tradition of affording unquestioning aid and hospitality to strangers, even when this could involve (as in the event it does) danger and death - a custom summed up in the Arabic poetry that we hear spoken after the opening credits: "In questions of brotherhood, never refuse a guest." But the Bedouins' way of life is under threat; their age-old occupation, guiding pilgrims through the desert to Mecca, is being supplanted by the newly constructed railway. And, as it turns out, that same 'iron donkey trail' also motivates the Englishman (who wants to blow it up) and the bandit leader who brings about his death - since he too, he tells Theeb, used to be a pilgrim guide.

This man (billed simply as 'stranger'), showing up halfway through the action as a silhouetted, seemingly dying figure slumped on a camel, is the film's most ambiguous character. As played by Hassan Mutlag, he exerts a raffish charm that keeps Theeb fascinated; even though one of the man's accomplices killed Theeb's beloved older brother Hussein, it sometimes seems as if the boy may be tempted to throw in his lot with the bandit – who for his part demonstrates an almost fatherly care for the youngster. But as



Well versed: Jacir Eid

the introductory verses also warn, "If the wolves offer friendship, do not count on success," and only when it finally becomes clear just why Hussein died does the dynamic decisively shift.

Nowar directs with sure-footed confidence, controlling the pace and subtly building the tension to the film's first shock moment at a well. Funded by Abu Dhabi, Jordan, Qatar and the UK, *Theeb* won the Orizzonti Award for Best Director at the Venice Film Festival. It also picked up a well-deserved award at Camerimage, the International Film Festival of the Art of Cinematography: DP Wolfgang Thaler, who

shot Ulrich Seidel's *Paradise* trilogy, captures all the stark, merciless beauty of the desert, not least in the nocturnal scenes. (Locations were Wadi Rum and Wadi Arabeh, home to Jordan's last nomadic tribes.) Jerry Lane's Arab-inflected score, evocative of space and distance, often relies on unaccompanied wordless voices.

A survival story at once epic in its historical implications and intimate as a coming-of-age tale (besides offering a tribute to a vanishing way of life), *Theeb* marks a new highpoint for Jordanian cinema and a more than promising feature debut for its director. §

Credits and Synopsis

Producers
Rupert Lloyd
Bassel Ghandour
Screenplay
Bassel Ghandour
Najir Abu Nowar
Director of
Photography
Wolfgang Thaler
Editor
Rupert Lloyd

d Anna Lavelle
ddour Music
Jerry Lane
ddour Sound Designer
war Dario Swade
Costume Designer
Jamila Aladdin
alter

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A Bayt Al Shawareb
production
In association with
Noor Pictures
In co-production
with Immortal
Supported by Abu
Dhabi Film Festival,
Joha Film Institute,
Visions Sud Est

With the support of SANAD Recipient of postproduction grant from Doha Film Institute and Visions Sud Est **Executive Producer** Nadine Toukan

Cast Marji Audeh Marji Jack Fox Edward Hussein Salameh Hussein Hassan Mutlag stranger Jacir Eid In Colour [2.35:1] Subtitles Distributor New Wave Films

dead. Hussein and Theeb hide in the rocks. Hussein shoots and wounds the bandit leader but is himself killed during the night. Theeb hides in the well.

Next morning, Theeb emerges to find the wadi empty, and buries Hussein. A camel approaches with a man slumped on it: it is the wounded bandit leader, abandoned by his associates. Theeb takes the bandit's gun, then reluctantly helps him recover. They set out for the railway, encountering some anti-Turkish Bedouin rebels en route. The bandit explains that he used to be a pilgrim guide, before the railway robbed him of his livelihood. At a Turkish fort, Theeb sees the bandit sell Edward's notebook, watch and detonator to the Turkish lieutenant. Realising that Hussein was killed merely for profit, Theeb shoots the bandit dead. The lieutenant tells Theeb to go home.

The Hejaz region of the Ottoman Empire, around 1916. Theeb ('Wolf') is the third and youngest son of Bedouin sheikh Abu Hmond, who has recently died. Theeb's eldest brother has become the new sheikh. Theeb's other brother Hussein is teaching him to shoot. Two strangers arrive in the tribe's camp and are offered hospitality: a British officer, Edward, and his Bedouin guide Marji. When Marji explains that Edward wants to be guided to the Roman Well, Hussein offers to take them there. The three men set off and Theeb surreptitiously follows. When he catches up, Edward wants him sent back, but Hussein refuses. The Roman Well proves to be polluted with the blood of the men Edward hoped to meet there to guide him to the railway. At the next wadi they encounter six bandits; Edward and Marji are shot

Trainwreck

USA/Japan 2015 Director: Judd Apatow

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Amy Schumer is a rising star in US comedy, with an acclaimed cable television show (cannily chopped up for YouTube consumption to create several viral hits) in which she airs her frank and earthy views about sex and sexual politics. Her shtick undercuts her stroppy observations about society's double standards with a wide seam of self-parody, and this rhetorical compromise is echoed in her trademark style of delivery, which can be summed up as 'LOUD GAG (muttered punchline)'.

Schumer's self-penned big-screen vehicle looks like a smart career move; it follows her established formula closely, but fleshes out her drunken-slut persona into a more rounded character, with family troubles and a backstory to provide both context for her party-animal antics and opportunities to demonstrate a little more emotional range on the acting front. Inevitably, the narrative is propelled by a marriage plot: Amy's life of contented promiscuity and career ambition (she is a journalist on a Maxim-style men's magazine) is thrown into confusion when she meets Aaron (Bill Hader), who is not only not put off by the speed at which she jumps into bed with him, but actually seems to want to start a relationship with her. To her surprise, Amy finds that she wants this too, but before wedding bells can chime she must mend her ways and learn how to be a good girl.

Given this reformed-sinner plot, it's perhaps not surprising that the first half of the film is much more fun than the second. Schumer has a blast depicting Amy's sexual misadventures, and her sassy performance is complemented by hilarious turns from John Cena (as Amy's sort-of boyfriend, a muscle-bound hunk who speaks only in motivational clichés with unintentional gay overtones) and Tilda Swinton (almost unrecognisable as Amy's scene-stealing boss Dianna). There are generous cameos, too, from the likes of Ezra Miller and



Off the rails: Amy Schumer, Bill Hader

Daniel Radcliffe, proving that Schumer has the gravitational pull of a proper movie star.

It's disappointing then that the advent of Aaron drags the film into such conventional territory; for all her supposedly feminist credentials (and it's questionable whether promiscuity is about equality or just another form of exploitation), Schumer's only mainstream-friendly option is to drag her character in the direction of apple pie and motherhood. Even the fact that Amy has a successful career is seen as problematic, especially when it threatens—sin of sins—to undermine Aaron's professional life.

While Schumer seems prepared to satirise romcom clichés (she layers a cheesy montage of romantic scenes with a sarcastic voiceover, and ends with a shot of Amy giving Aaron oral sex on the bench where Woody Allen and Diane Keaton watched the sunrise in *Manhattan*), she ultimately follows the rules. Schumer's film might have been as subversive as, say, Jason Reitman's *Young Adult*(2011), where the trainwreck character stayed a wreck until the bitter end, but instead it's just reasonably funny, and instantly forgettable. She wants to have her slut-cake and eat her happy ending too. §

True Story

USA 2015 Director: Rupert Goold Certificate 15 99m 14s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The professional disgrace and quasi-resurrection of journalist Michael Finkel was a low-profile event relative to the exposure of, say, gross fabrication by Stephen Glass at *The New Republic* in 1998. Finkel committed an arguably lesser breach of journalistic ethics in writing a *New York Times Magazine* story about a composite character and passing him off as a single representative of cocoa farm abuse.

In disgrace, this film's Finkel (Jonah Hill) is startled to learn that one Christian Longo (James Franco) has been using his name as an alias in Cancun while on the run following the murder of his wife and three children. Intrigued, Finkel meets with Longo in jail and eventually agrees to write a book about the murder, the adaptation of which we're now watching.

While the Glass story was told with forensically procedural thoroughness in Billy Ray's *Shattered Glass* (2003), Rupert Goold's *True Story* is an anti-procedural. When Finkel receives voluminous letters from Longo, their contents are editorially chopped up into meaningless fragments of Franco's half-sentence voiceover, while the centrepiece jail tête-à-têtes are big on watery 'character building', ie frequently atrocious dialogue dully filmed in handheld shot reverse shot.

In one long two-shot exchange between Finkel and said prosecutor down by the river, DP Masonobu Takayanagi uses lens flare from the setting sun to divide the space between the two. He pans around the flare and bisects the screen with it in every possible direction repeatedly, a visual flourish with absolutely no dramatic or thematic relationship to what's on screen. Takeaway conclusion: this is a film so rightfully bored with itself that it would rather stare directly into the sun. §

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Judd Apato Barry Mendel Written by Amy Schume Director of Photography Jody Lee Lines Edited by William Kerr Paul Zucker **Production Designer** Kevin Thompson Music Jon Brion Production Tom Nelson Costume Designe Leesa Evans

©Universal Studios Production Companies Universal Pictures presents an Apatow production A Judd Apatow film Presented in association with Dentsu Inc./ Fuji Television Network, Inc. **Executive Producer** David Householter

Cast
Amy Schumer
Amy
Bill Hader
Aaron
Brie Larson
Kim
Colin Quinn
Gordon
John Cena
Steven
Vanessa Bayer
Nilkki
Tom
Ezra Miller
Donald
Dave Attell
Noam

Dianna

himself

dogwalker

LeBron James

Daniel Radcliffe

Marisa Tomei dog owner

Dolby Digital In Colour [2.35:1]

DistributorUniversal Pictures
International
UK & Eire

New York, present day. Amy's father was a serial adulterer and heavy drinker, and he drummed it into his daughters that monogamy was impossible. Amy now lives by his creed, partying hard and sleeping around. She has no interest in a relationship, preferring one-night stands and occasional movie dates with her 'friend with benefits' Steven – whom she unceremoniously dumps when he shows signs of wanting something more serious. Meanwhile, Amy works as a writer on a men's magazine and spends time with her father, who is in a home suffering from multiple sclerosis, and with her sister Kim, who is married and pregnant.

Amy is sent to interview a sports doctor, Aaron, and they have a one-night stand. She is surprised and disturbed when he subsequently calls her and asks to see her again, but she likes him and soon finds herself dating him. However, she is not prepared to leave her selfish habits behind, and her demanding job means that she lets Aaron down by missing an event held to honour his charity work. When they break up, she realises that she wants to change. Having been fired from her job, she cleans her apartment, stops drinking and surprises Aaron with an elaborate cheerleader routine in order to prove that she can be a normal girlfriend. They become engaged.

Credits and Synopsis

Jeremy Kleiner Anthony Patagas Screenplay Rupert Goold David Kajganich Based on the book by Michael Finkel Director of Photography Masanobu Takayanagi Edited by Christopher Tellefsen Nicolas de Toth Production Designer Jeremy Hindle Music Marco Beltrami Sound Mixer Drew Kunin Costume Designer Catherine Marie

Thomas

Produced by

Dede Gardner

Production Companies Regency Enterprises presents a New Regency/Plan B production

Cast Jonah Hill Michael Finkel James Franco Christian Longo **Felicity Jones** Jill Barker Robert John Burke Greg Ganley **Gretchen Mol** Karen Hannen Ethan Suplee Pat Frato Maria Dizzia MaryJane Longo Connor Kikot Zach Longo **Charlotte Driscoll** Sadie Longo Stella Rae Payne Madison Longo Byron Jennings Judge Odenkirk Betty Gilpin Cheryl Frank Seth Barrish

Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]

Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)

US, 2002. Disgraced journalist Michael Finkel learns that Christian Longo, accused of killing his wife and children, was using his name while on the run. Finkel meets with Longo in jail and sells a book about the case to HarperCollins. In court, Longo claims he murdered his wife and one child after she killed their other two children, but is convicted of all four murders.





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Come dine with me: Andréa Férreol and Philippe Noiret - and Michel Piccoli (above right) - in La Grande Bouffe

WHAT'S EATING MARCO FERRERI?

Like many of Ferreri's films, La Grande Bouffe finds its male protagonists struggling in a world where masculinity is redundant

LA GRANDE BOUFFE

Marco Ferreri; Italy/France 1973; Arrow/Region A and B Bluray/Region 1 and 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 130 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: 1975 French TV profile of Ferreri, behind the scenes, French chat-show interview, Cannes press conference, visual essay and commentary by Pasquale lannone, booklet

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

If Marco Ferreri was among the greatest marginal Italian filmmakers, his marginality functioned on several levels. For one thing, his position within Italian cinema was necessarily peripheral, since so much of his work was shot in Spain, France and the US. For another, his political concerns inspired him to push against the boundaries of what could be shown on screen in a way that marked him out as a nonconformist even in a generation of auteurs that included Pier Paolo Pasolini and Bernardo Bertolucci. To paraphrase D.H. Lawrence, the Pasolini of *Salò* was trying to be extreme; Ferreri just was extreme.

Salò(1975) is almost certainly the title those encountering La Grande Bouffe for the first time will be reminded of. Indeed, Ferreri's film seems so obviously to have been conceived as a parody of Pasolini's that it is difficult to believe it was actually made two years earlier. The plot involves four men who occupy positions of privilege within French society and who bear the first names of the actors (all Ferreri regulars) playing them - Marcello (Mastroianni), Ugo (Tognazzi), Michel (Piccoli) and Philippe (Noiret). As in Salò, these men retreat to a mansion, but there, rather than tormenting helpless innocents, they methodically commit suicide by overeating. Although their reason for doing this is never made clear (the plan itself only being revealed around the halfway point), it is obviously related to the same insight that motivated Gérard (Depardieu) to castrate himself at the end of Ferreri's La Dernière Femme (1976): the realisation that masculinity has been rendered redundant.

If Pasolini often focused on men resisting the institutions that restrained their sexual impulses, Ferreri was more interested in individuals who were the products of societies that had, for all intents and purposes, ceased to exist: his films frequently introduce their protagonists as solitary

intruders in otherwise vacant landscapes, while Bye Bye Monkey (1978) takes place in a New York patrolled by mysterious hazmat-suited figures and in danger of being taken over by rats. Ferreri's work often has a post-apocalyptic feel, as if some unspecified catastrophe has taken place, leaving survivors with the task of finding new ways to live amid the actual and ideological debris of the past. And although the director claimed, in an interview for Cahiers du cinéma, that he did not understand women ("I have a masculine vocabulary. I was formed, brought up, in a masculine culture"), it is usually women who prove most adept at meeting this challenge. Men, by contrast, insist on reproducing patterns of behaviour that, stripped of context, seem farcical, and in those films where society is still robust enough to exert a direct influence these unreconstructed males simply move to a space outside it: to an island in Liza (1972), a

To paraphrase D.H. Lawrence, the Pasolini of 'Salò' was trying to be extreme; Ferreri just was extreme



Yugoslavian villa in *The Harem*(1967), a house by the sea in *La Carne*(1991) and the mansion in *La Grande Bouffe*.

There is, however, nothing rebellious about their exhibitions of aggressive masculinity. Ferreri's 'heroes' are never more fully representative of the dominant ideology than when they believe themselves to be angrily rejecting it. If *La Grande Bouffe*'s four gourmands thumb their noses at bourgeois morality. they nonetheless subscribe to precisely the consumerist principles that once played an essential role in maintaining a functioning economy - and which, free of all externally imposed restrictions, can now be pursued to their logical conclusion. As responsible subjects under capitalism, we should, after all, be free to eat as much as we can afford to pay for, so why not keep eating until we expire?

The main female character, Andréa (Ferréol), who is sexually involved with all four men, suggests a healthier alternative to this deathorientated activity. When the final delivery of food arrives, she orders it to be strewn about the garden, an idea the delivery men respond to with incomprehension ("It's good meat!") and contempt. Her insistence on having objects with a quantifiable value disposed of like so much rubbish is the one truly rebellious act in this film. Ferreri seems to have been fascinated by narratives in which four men become involved with a woman who rejects the notion of sexual exclusivity - but whereas The Harem's Margherita (Carroll Baker) is ultimately destroyed by her lovers, La Grande Bouffe's Andréa becomes the sole human survivor in an arena littered with male corpses, covered in the detritus of consumerism, and overrun by dogs.

Although the bulk of Ferreri's oeuvre remains unknown in the UK, La Grande Bouffe not only enjoyed British theatrical distribution (at least in the capital – it was awarded an X certificate by the Greater London Council after being banned by the BBFC) but has also been available for home viewing since the earliest days of VHS and Betamax; an English-dubbed transfer, taken from an astonishingly battered print, was released as a rental-only tape by Intervision in 1979 under the title Blow Out.

Arrow's Blu-ray/DVD edition contains a flawless 2K restoration of the original camera negative (we can now clearly see the technician reflected in a mirror behind Noiret at 9m 50s) and a generous selection of extras. The most enchanting of these is a 1975 French television documentary in which Ferreri chooses clips from films that influenced him, including Luis Buñuel's Nazarin (1959) and Tex Avery's King-Size Canary (1947)! There is also a booklet containing some useful critical writing on the film by Johnny Mains and Sight & Sound contributor Michael Brooke. Arrow's disc will hopefully sell well enough to encourage further Ferreri releases; certainly Don't Touch the White Woman! (1974), in which all four male leads from La Grande Bouffe participate in a recreation of Custer's Last Stand shot on the streets of mid-1970s Paris, should have little trouble attracting a cult following. 9

New releases

LA BOHEME

Luigi Comencini; France 1988; Gaumont/Region-free Blu-ray; 106 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'making of' documentary

BORIS GODUNOV

Andrzej Zulawski; France 1989; Gaumont/Region-free Bluray; 117 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: 'making of' documentary

Reviewed by David Thompson

The shared dream of former Paris Opera director Rolf Liebermann and Gaumont's Daniel Toscan du Plantier to increase the audience for opera through high-budget movies began boldly with Joseph Losey's *Don Giovanni* (1979) and Francesco Rosi's *Carmen* (1984), but thereafter failed to make much of an impact. These films of *La Bohème* and *Boris Godunov*, now given the deluxe Blu-ray treatment, had a very limited release in the late 1980s but they vividly illustrate the pros and cons of transferring this most theatrical of forms to the screen.

Luigi Comencini, better known in Italy than outside for his popular comedies, took a traditional approach to the most *verismo* of Puccini's operas, shooting on studio sets and encouraging his performers to naturalistic acting. His main liberty was to update the events from mid-19th-century Paris to 1910, so that the importance of lighted candles is rendered less significant in a city illuminated by electricity.

While the policy of the Gaumont series was to film singers in the roles they had recorded beforehand, Comencini's project was stymied by José Carreras (as Rodolfo) falling seriously ill after a week of shooting, so that he had to be replaced by a miming actor. Luca Canonici does a creditable job, but he lacks the necessary charisma, as to some degree does his Mimi, the American-born Barbara Hendricks. Aside from a brief fantasy image when Rodolfo first sees Mimi in — literally — a romantic light, and a silent role created specially for a morose Massimo Girotti, the end result is often conventional to the point of dullness.

Andrzej Zulawski's take on Mussorgsky's Boris Godunov is a whole other matter. Taking over from proposed director Andrzej Wajda (an



French spaghetti: Cemetery Without Crosses

unsuitable candidate anyway, as he is allegedly tone deaf), Zulawski substantially pruned the complete recording already made under Mstislav Rostropovich (though he retained the colourful Polish act, usually absent these days from the stage). Right from the beginning, he underlines the artificiality of the medium: he shows us an audience assembling in the opera house, with the crew in full view, and he cuts back and forth between sets and real locations in Yugoslavia, even introducing soldiers in contemporary uniforms to establish parallels with Russia a century on from the opera's composition.

Ruggero Raimondi, who takes the title role, had already established himself as a screen presence in Losey's *Don Giovanni*, but Zulawski cast a young French actress, Delphine Forest, as the Polish princess Marina, to the annoyance of Rostropovich's wife Galina Vishnevskaya, who had recorded the role but was by then over 60. The furious conductor tried to stop the film being shown; as Zulawski points out in an amusing interview on the disc, he failed to prepare his case properly, accusing the director of having created lewd scenes and added noisy sound effects that simply didn't exist.

The result is a thrilling, challenging, occasionally perverse but undeniably cinematic version of the greatest of Russian operas. **Disc:** Both operas are in beautiful transfers with excellent English subtitles; the documentaries are only translated for French speakers.

CEMETERY WITHOUT CROSSES

Robert Hossein; France/Italy 1969; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 90 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: new and archive interviews with Robert Hossein, archive French TV news report on the film's making, theatrical trailer, booklet with new writing by Ginette Vincendeau and Rob Young

Reviewed by James Blackford

Robert Hossein is an unjustly neglected French actor, director and writer of Jewish-Iranian descent, whose elegant, unassuming genre films of the late 1950s and 1960s fell foul of the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics' rejection of the 'tradition of quality'. Consequently, his films have largely remained unavailable on DVD and Blu-ray, making this a very welcome, overdue release of his masterful, melancholy western *Cemetery Without Crosses*.

A 1969 French-Italian co-production filmed on sets in Almería, Spain, *Cemetery* was born of the spaghetti western craze – Hossein even dedicates his film to "his friend" Sergio Leone in the end credits. Yet Hossein worked with a mostly French cast and crew, and his father André Hossein provided the film's memorably dramatic score (and theme tune, as sung by Scott Walker). The film is something of a fusion: a legitimately Gallic western, influenced by both American and Italian models.

As befits the Leone dedication, *Cemetery* follows the 'Dollars Trilogy' narrative template of a solitary gunslinger (played by Hossein) who becomes entangled in the power struggles of a dangerous frontier town. Michèle Mercier is the widow



out for revenge who hires him to take down the ruthless family of ranchers responsible for hanging her husband.

As with the best of the spaghettis, Cemetery Without Crosses demythologises the American western with its fatalistic, morally ambiguous narrative and nihilistic antihero, and by ironically reappropriating the genre's cinematic language. But whereas Leone exaggerated the western's traits with virtuosic style and grandiose mise en scène, Hossein's approach is more to distil the genre. He adopts a precise, ascetic style reminiscent of Jean-Pierre Melville, marked by long periods without dialogue and an intense focus on essential images. In this filmic space, every pronounced camera movement, musical cue and look exchanged by the characters heightens the melodrama. The result is a compellingly pure take on the western, true to the tradition of French popular cinema. **Disc:** Presented in a new 2K scan of the film's original Italian duplicating negative, the image is pleasingly detailed, though there are noticeable instances of film damage. Audio options are English or Italian language. It's a shame the film's original French audio track was not also included, as most of the cast are French. There is a wealth of extras, including archival interviews and on-set footage.

CONTAMINATION

Luigi Cozzi; Italy 1980; Arrow Video/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 15; 95 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: interviews, commentary, featurettes, alternative audio, archival documentary, trailers, booklet

Reviewed by James Blackford

Contamination is an Italian-produced sci-fi horror gore-fest that has achieved some notoriety in the UK as one of the 72 films banned by the British censor during the 'video nasties' furore of the early 1980s. Directed by Luigi Cozzi, a diminutive disciple of Dario Argento who these days runs Argento's Profondo Rosso horror shop in Rome, it is one of the more enjoyable films to have earned that dubious distinction.

Contamination follows the time-honoured Italian exploitation tradition of ripping off recently successful American films in order to cash in. Here, Cozzi combines elements of Ridley Scott's Alien with Dawn of the Deadstyle Romero-isms and James Bond heroics.

The film starts promisingly with a prologue echoing Lucio Fulci's Zombie Flesh Eaters (which like this film stars Ian McCulloch): a large cargo ship drifts into New York Harbour, apparently unmanned. Hidden on board are giant extraterrestrial eggs which detonate when approached, projecting a toxic juice that will cause the torso of any splattered-upon human to explode. The US military's investigations, headed by Colonel Stella Holmes (Louise Marleau), reveal links to a recent mission to Mars, which has left one of the astronauts, Commander Hubbard (McCulloch), a disturbed alcoholic. Holmes and a revived Hubbard trace the eggs to a Colombian coffee plantation run by Hubbard's former astronaut colleague Hamilton (Siegfried Rauch). Here they find a huge crop of eggs farmed under the giant, pulsating eye of a hideous alien Cyclops, hell-bent on world domination.



Boys' own adventure: Hue and Cry

Cozzi's film is an impoverished production, lacking the flair found in the finest Italian horror. It is also wilfully unoriginal: a hotchpotch of ideas stolen from more luxurious forebears, with a cliché-ridden script and brain-dead performances. Yet, brazen in its ineptitude, Contamination somehow rises above its limitations by being outrageously tasteless, fast-moving and fun. Cozzi is a lifelong sci-fi nut, and ultimately his love for the genre shines through in the film's shaky sets, laughable giant rubber Cyclops and audacious, slow-motion exploding-stomach set pieces. It also helps that the film boasts one of Italian prog rockers Goblin's finest, funkiest scores. **Disc:** A stunning 2K scan from the original negative, presented with a wide array of extras.

HUE AND CRY

Charles Crichton; UK 1947; Studio Canal/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 78 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: introduction, location featurette

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Ealing had made comedies before, of course, but they'd mostly been star vehicles for the likes of George Formby, Will Hay or Tommy Trinder. *Hue and Cry* is widely reckoned to be the first 'Ealing comedy'; and clumsily plotted though it is, it qualifies on several counts. It's the first comedy scripted by Ealing regular T.E.B. ('Tibby') Clarke (Passport to Pimlico, The Lavender Hill Mob); it celebrates the perennial Ealing cult of go-getting amateurs, in this case a gang of London adolescents; and, like so many of the studio's wartime pictures (Went the Day Well, The Foreman Went to France), it evinces a bolshie mistrust of authority figures - cops, bosses and the like turn out to be the bad guys. (The chief villain is a pre-Dixon Jack Warner, complete with spivvy moustache and raucous laugh.)

The story borrows from Erich Kästner's muchfilmed classic *Emil and the Detectives* (a bunch of urban street kids gang up to foil criminals), though the chief plot device – secret messages concealed in a popular comic strip – is oddly reminiscent of the largely forgotten pre-war thriller *Midnight Menace* (1937), co-scripted by Alexander Mackendrick. But the film's ambience is totally of its just-post-war period, with London bombsites providing joyous health-and-safetyfree playgrounds for the kids, rather in the spirit of John Boorman's wartime-set *Hope and Glory* (1987). Director Charles Crichton tosses in a playful horror-movie spoof, with *Nosferatu*-style shadows (a spiral staircase, a prowling cat) and a sepulchral voice (Alastair Sim) echoing dire threats into the vault, while an escape through the sewers anticipates *The Third Man*. But the prevailing mood is one of (occasionally slightly forced) exuberance, with several hundred boys — and one very much token girl — rampaging through the battered streets of the capital. **Disc:** A scrupulous restoration, with Georges Auric's score (his first for Ealing) brought out in all its ebullience. Extras include a soberly informative intro by Steve Chibnall and a useful location featurette by Richard Dacre.

THE ANG LEE TRILOGY

PUSHING HANDS/THE WEDDING BANQUET/ EAT DRINK MAN WOMAN

Taiwan/USA1992/93/94; Altitude Film Distribution/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 105/106/124 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: booklet essay by Whitney Crothers Dilley

Reviewed by Kate Stables

Ang Lee is candid about his early work: "When I started out, nobody gave me scripts. So I had to write. That's why I wrote family dramas – I'm a domestic person, that's all I know."

Plump with family conflicts and marbled with clashes between tradition and modernity, Lee's Taiwanese films aren't known as the 'Father Knows Best' trilogy for nothing. Starting with the bittersweet dramedy *Pushing Hands*, which gently elides the traditional Taiwanese family melodrama with the Western variety, Lee examines fatherhood and the offspring's struggle with the Chinese tradition of Confucian filial piety from every angle.

In all three features, Sihung Lung (whom Lee regarded as the quintessence of the Chinese father on film) brings a subtle but significant sensitivity and physical expressiveness to his paternal journeys along the family fault lines. In *Pushing Hands*, his proud immigrant-outsider father, unable to assimilate into his Americanised son's nuclear family, smoothes the film's occasionally bumpy transitions from suburban tension to sobbing schism and lends its broadly comic tai-chi showdown a useful dignity.

By contrast, *The Wedding Banquet* takes its equally chewy themes (culture clash, sexual identity, gender roles) at a gallop, screenwriter/ producer James Schamus having transformed Lee's tragic original story into a screwball marriage-of-convenience comedy between a gay Asian-American and a green-card-seeking Chinese artist. Under its frothy satire of lavish Chinese wedding customs and the secret domestic masquerades of parents, gay lovers and fake spouses lies a telling comparison of Chinese ritualised public sexuality and private, individualistic Western coupling. Balance, both in the treatment of rival cultures and narrative outcomes, is Lee's goal, and the film's final reimagining of the idea of family restores that key Confucian tenet, harmony.

Despite gaining international success with The Wedding Banquet, Lee then chose to set Eat Drink Man Woman in Taiwan, flipping the eastwest question to consider the effect of globalisation and changing codes of duty

Rediscovery

THE DREAMERS

A subversive 70s retelling of the Sleeping Beauty story becomes a melancholy meditation on lost innocence

SOME CALL IT LOVING

James B. Harris; USA 1973; Etiquette Pictures/ Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD Dual Format; 103 minutes; 1.78:1; Features: commentary by James B. Harris, video featurettes with Harris and cinematographer Mario Tosi, extensive outtakes

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

The sporadic and entirely fascinating output of James B. Harris as a director exists in dialogue with the filmography of the man who was his partner and mentor at the beginning of his career, Stanley Kubrick.

After working together for years under the auspices of Harris-Kubrick Pictures, producer Harris and Kubrick parted company after the pre-production of *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964); Kubrick wanted to play the material as farce, and Harris, dying to direct, struck off on his own with a nuclear tragedy, *The Bedford Incident* (1965).

Later, the string of out-of-time B-noir thrillers that Harris shot – Fast-Walking (1982), Cop (1988), and Boiling Point (1993) – seemed to hark back to his first collaboration with Kubrick, on 1956's Jim Thompson-penned The Killing. But the outlier in Harris's own filmography – a 1973 independent production called Some Call It Loving, which has the air of a sad fairytale – offers the strangest parallel of all, for it seems to anticipate rather than echo a Kubrick film, in this case his final testament, Eyes Wide Shut (1999).

Scuttlebutt has it that, while preparing his last film, Kubrick consulted the star of Some Call It Loving, Zalman King, who in subsequent years had established himself as a specialist in erotic subjects through his work in the Red Shoe Diaries series, though when he starred for Harris he was a television actor best known for appearances on The Young Lawyers. King brought an offbeat charisma, crooked good looks and a touching, boyish guilelessness to the principal role in Harris's film, that of aesthete Robert Troy, who lives in a baronial California playpen/home with two female companions (Carol White and Veronica Anderson), whom he conducts in elaborate sexual role-playing sessions when not stepping out to perform with his jazz combo.

The scenes at the jazz club are among the film's few departures from the confines of Troy's stately pleasure dome; another is a fairground where Troy encounters and is captivated by a 'Sleeping Beauty' act. (The film is inspired by John Collier's short story 'Sleeping Beauty', which Harris acquired sometime around the shooting of *Lolita*.) The barker presents to the audience a beautiful young woman (Tisa Farrow) in a catatonic trance; for a small price, they may line up and attempt to awaken her with a kiss. Troy buys the act, girl and



The big sleep: Tisa Farrow, Zalman King and Logan Ramsey in Some Call It Loving

all, and brings Sleeping Beauty home to join his housemates. Finding the ladies in bed together, he steps into their chambers and announces "I bought a Sleeping Beauty... she's in the other room... I'm waiting for her to wake up"—a cryptic announcement which they accept as though it were the most natural thing in the world.

Troy offers no explanations, and it is one of the inspirations of *Some Call It Loving* to offer none for the closed world that it creates either, instead merely presenting it to the viewer without excuse or apology, to be accepted or rejected as they see fit. (Initially, Harris had provided a backstory and a psychological profile for Troy, material that was shot and wisely excluded, though some of it is included here among the extras.) Troy ceases to feed his Sleeping Beauty on the narcotic formula that had kept her comatose, and in time she's up and about, joining in the group play at the house, where life is lived at a somnambulistic pace.

The odd man out in the cast, by virtue of both his skin tone and his performance style, is Richard Pryor, then on the cusp of superstardom, who plays a junkie habitué at the jazz club to whom Troy is inexplicably attached. Pryor, rambling and cracking up at his own jokey asides, doesn't seem like he's in another movie so much as

The film has the air of a sad fairytale... it seems to anticipate Kubrick's 'Eyes Wide Shut'

watching this one and cutting up over it, a destabilising element of rude energy frolicking among these half-ghosts, tousling their hair.

Harris is a Juilliard dropout and lifelong jazz lover, and through the choreography of the performers, the cinematography of Mario Tosi and the score by Bob Harris (James's brother, and the author of *Lolita*'s love theme) and Richard Hazard (a frequent conductor for Lalo Schiffrin), he endeavoured to create a sort of visual music here, unlike anything else in his filmography before or after. (Despite rapturous reviews in the French press and in this publication, the film was panned stateside, and took a ruinous financial loss.)

Speaking of *Some Call It Loving* to me earlier this year, Harris said: "I wanted the main character to be a jazz musician, because jazz music is based on variations of themes." Repetition and ritual are the keys to life in the manor, and we see the same games played over and over again, each time with a different emotional tone, gradually suffused by a deeper and deeper melancholy. With his awoken Sleeping Beauty, an arrested-development case with the body of a woman and the mind of a little girl, Troy tries earnestly to recapture the innocence of first love but eventually finds that he has no feeling left beneath the forms of ceremony.

This agonised work of self-examination, the confession of an ageing Lothario imprisoned by habit and unable to break the cycle, ends with an image of Troy as a mechanised man, condemned to repeat the "Step right up!" patter of a carny barker. It's as harrowing a self-portrait as exists in American movies. §

New releases

on a widowed master chef baffled by his three restless unmarried daughters. The elaborate meals he prepares as expressions of his affection are a perpetuation of traditional Chinese culture, the dishes a complex linguistic signifier, as Whitney Crothers Dilley's careful essay analysis notes. Combined with Lee's use of space and framing to convey psychodrama, present since the insistent door-framings of Pushing Hands and the telling table groupings of *The Wedding Banquet*, this results in a deftly multilavered film, whose unconventional relationships resonate richly with the hardwon family outcomes of its predecessors. Disc: Pleasant enough transfers, though Pushing Hands has a slightly grainy quality. Not quite a barebones release, thanks to Dilley's expert overview.

MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA/ KINO-PRAVDA NO. 21/ ONE-SIXTH OF THE GLOBE/ THREE SONGS OF LENIN

Dziga Vertov; USSR 1929/25/26/34; BFI/Region B Blu-ray; 67/36/84/61 minutes; Certificate U; 1.33:1 (and 1.19:1 'Three Songs of Lenin'); Features: commentary, poetry reading, interview, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Doubly canonised by this magazine in recent years, ranked number eight in 2012's Greatest Films of All Time poll and number one in 2014's documentary equivalent, Dziga Vertov's still constantly surprising and playful metamasterpiece *Man with a Movie Camera* (scored here by Michael Nyman) needs little introduction — so it may be more useful to focus on the other three films included on this BFI release.

Kino-Pravda No. 21 was the antepenultimate of 23 newsreels made by Vertov, his cameraman brother Mikhail Kaufman and editor wife Elizaveta Svilova, and is a good early illustration of their approach - as much experimental propaganda as heartfelt tribute to the recently deceased Lenin. Its parallel theme of the encroachment of Soviet influence is expanded in the feature-length One-Sixth of the Globe, an ambitious attempt to encapsulate the breadth of the Soviet empire as it then was, compared and contrasted with the decadent West: the Soviets feed their ethnic minorities, whereas Westerners mock them in blackface minstrel shows. The new electronic soundtrack by Mordant Music won't be to all tastes (understatement) but it chimes very effectively with Vertov's abiding urge to shake up filmic conventions – and even at the time, composers such as Aleksandr Mosolov were producing pile-drivingly 'industrial' scores.

The final film, *Three Songs of Lenin*(1934), brings us full circle with what is broadly a tenth-anniversary expansion of the *Kino-Pravda* newsreel. The frenzied experimentalism has been toned down, out of both technical and political necessity (the sound era, Stalin), but Vertov still shows a keen interest in the Soviet empire's further-flung regions: a sequence in which Muslim women cast off their veils resonates to this day, even if much of the rest is unavoidably a museum piece. In a commendably scholarly touch, two sets of subtitles offer either a literal translation of the

three anonymous lyrics that fuel the film or W.H. Auden's more poetic rewrites from 1935, whose existence was only rumoured until their very recent discovery in the BFI archives. **Disc:** Allowances have to be made for advanced age and the fact that none of these titles has undergone full restoration (whether this would improve the already battered third-party footage that Vertov co-opted remains open to question), but all four films scrub up very nicely in high definition. Generous extras include Russian film historian Yuri Tsivian's critical commentary on Man with a Movie Camera, a reading and discussion by Simon Callow and David Collard of the Auden translations of the *Three Songs of Lenin*, and the usual comprehensive booklet.

POST-WAR BRITISH THRILLERS

THE YELLOW BALLOON

J. Lee Thompson; UK 1953; StudioCanal/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 77 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: introduction, stills gallery

DAVDOLL

Sidney Hayers; UK 1961; StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 106 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: introduction

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

How public sensibilities change. The Yellow Balloon, now being rereleased with a PG certificate, was one of the first British films to be X-rated on its initial release. Even so, it retains a certain bite, thanks mainly to the insidious performance of American actor William Sylvester as the saturnine small-time crook who coerces an innocent lad (Andrew Ray, rather overdoing the wide-eyed look) into becoming his accomplice after witnessing the boy accidentally cause the death of a friend. I. Lee Thompson (who by then had dropped

the hyphen) would return to this criminal/kid dynamic six years later in *Tiger Bay* (1959), but in less exploitative vein. (There's a variant on it too in his first US movie, 1962's *Cape Fear*.)

Like many London-set films of the post-war era, Balloon makes atmospheric use of the capital's bombsites (it's on one of these that the crucial accident occurs) and even more so the disused tube station where the final showdown plays out. Kenneth More and Kathleen Ryan (Odd Man Out) make what they can of constricted roles as the boy's parents, and there's an enjoyable, amused cameo from Hy Hazell as the kindly prostitute (her profession is most discreetly suggested) who briefly takes him under her wing.

Eight years on, with the British New Wave in full swing, *Payroll* is an altogether grittier proposition. Anticipating *Get Carter* with its Newcastle setting, it owes a sizeable debt to Stanley Kubrick's classic heist movie *The Killing* (1956); the final look-how-futile-it-all-was shot is almost a direct quote.

Four ill-assorted guys (Michael Craig, Tom Bell, Kenneth Griffith, Barry Keegan) plan to rob a firm's payroll van, with the aid of an insider (William Lucas) who hopes that his cut of the proceeds will save his flagging marriage. Unusually for a British action movie of the period, the film boasts two strong female roles. As Lucas's discontented Austrian wife, Françoise Prévost exudes a soignée contempt that flakes away to reveal underlying avidity. But the film is almost stolen by Billie Whitelaw, playing the wife of a security guard killed in the robbery, who transforms from loving suburban spouse into blazing-eyed avenging angel, implacably on the trail.

The plot trajectory, following the classic riseand-fall template of heist movies from *The Asphalt*



Eat Drink Man Woman Ang Lee's 'Father Knows Best' trilogy is plump with family conflicts and marbled with clashes between tradition and modernity

Jungle onward, is predictable enough. But Sidney Hayers, a versatile journeyman director of B-pics (Night of the Eagle, The Trap), rings the changes on the formula and keeps up the tension, especially in the well-paced action sequences, spurred on by Reg Owen's hot-jazz-tinged score. The occasional Geordie accent would've been welcome, though. Disc: Clean, crisp restorations. Charles Barr and Steve Chibnall contribute brief, informative introductions.

THE ROBERTO ROSSELLINI **INGRID BERGMAN COLLECTION**

STROMBOLI LAND OF GOD/JOURNEY TO ITALY/FEAR

Roberto Rossellini; Italy/Germany 1950/54/54; BFI/ Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate PG; 100/86/83 minutes: 1.33:1: Features: 'The Machine that Kills Bad People' (Rossellini, 1952), 2012 documentary 'The War of the Volcanoes', Ingrid Bergman interviewed at the National Film Theatre, video essay by Tag Gallagher, 'My Dad Is 100 Years Old' (Guy Maddin, 2005), 'Journey to Italy' audio commentaries by Laura Mulvey and Adrian Martin, alternative Italian cut of 'Journey to Italy', illustrated booklet

Reviewed by Brad Stevens

The five features (and a short) that resulted from Roberto Rossellini's romantic and professional partnership with Ingrid Bergman make up one of cinema's most problematic bodies of work. Initially dismissed as incompetent, several of the films were later re-evaluated as masterpieces, but until recently they have remained difficult to see, making the boxsets released by Criterion in the US and the BFI in the UK especially welcome. Curiously, Criterion's collection contains the sublime Europe '51 but not Fear, the BFI's contains Fear but not Europe '51, and Joan of Arc at the Stake (1954) is missing from both. But Stromboli and *Journey to Italy* provide an excellent introduction to the mysteries of this collaboration.

There seems to be little connection between Stromboli's Karin, who marries an Italian peasant in order to obtain her release from a refugee camp, and Journey to Italy's Katherine, an Englishwoman forced to re-evaluate her marriage while visiting Italy, but both characters reflect Bergman's inability to comprehend fully her new husband's artistic world. Her obvious awkwardness – as compared with the smooth confidence of her performances in Sweden and Hollywood-repelled many commentators, but Rossellini was clearly testing the limits of screen 'acting', obliging his star to abandon her 'professional' techniques and reveal the 'genuine' person hidden nervously beneath.

These films have been called documentaries about Ingrid Bergman, and they exerted a significant influence on filmmakers (Antonioni, Cassavetes, Rivette, Ferrara) who were interested in interrogating the line between 'performing' and 'being', questioning whether surface gestures revealed or concealed deeper truths. Fear channels this documentary impulse in a different direction, taking an overtly critical view of heterosexual relationships. Perhaps acknowledging the power struggles in his own marriage, Rossellini here casts Bergman (revisiting her role in George Cukor's Gaslight) as a woman being sadistically manipulated by her husband. The result is a bleakly fascinating, almost nihilistic piece



POW POV: Don Taylor and William Holden in Stalag 17

that anticipates Vertigo and Michael Haneke. **Disc:** The Blu-ray transfers (also available on DVD) are razor-sharp but, unlike Criterion's release, this collection does not contain the superior English-language version of Stromboli. The slightly shorter Italian-dubbed edition included here lacks Bergman's voice, and makes a nonsense of those scenes constructed around her character's inability to communicate. Additionally, the BBFC has removed 12 seconds of footage showing a rabbit being killed by a ferret; this scene, originally one of the most powerful in the film, is now incomprehensible.

We are offered English and Italian transfers of Journey to Italy, but the latter is merely the English cut dubbed into ill-fitting Italian, with one scene of linguistic confusion removed. Fear is presented only in its English edition, though a German version was shot simultaneously. The absence of the short The Chicken (available in Criterion's boxset) is also regrettable, but the selection of extras is otherwise admirably extensive, a highlight being The Machine that Kills Bad People, the rarely seen feature Rossellini was working on when the opportunity to collaborate with Bergman arose, and whose completion he consequently left to others. This humorous tale of a camera that kills everyone it photographs provides an ironic commentary on neorealism's assumptions, and functions as a prologue to the Bergman/Rossellini films, in which the director's camera cuts through (rather than simply recording) surface reality.

STALAG 17

Billy Wilder: USA 1953: Eureka Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 120 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: audio commentary with Donald Bevan, Richard Erdman and Gil Stratton, 'Stalag 17: From Reality to Screen', 'The Real Heroes of Stalag 17', interview with Neil Sinyard, 36-page booklet

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Billy Wilder's great comedy-thriller, Hollywood's first important POW movie, is one of those films that's hard to think about on its own

terms because of all the other things it started: without *Stalag 17*, no *The Great Escape*, obviously; but you can see its influence in so many other depictions of trapped men with swollen libidos, cracking jokes and poking at the authorities, from MASH to Porridge.

Hindsight does confer some advantages, though: it doesn't seem to have been clear to audiences at the time that the way the American POWs scapegoat William Holden's cynical outsider Sefton following the deaths of two escaping prisoners had anything to do with the antics of the House Un-American Activities Committee. Maybe you can go further: the outsider who makes an easy target when you need someone to blame – isn't Sefton also, at some level, a Jew? Maybe *Stalag 17* counts as Hollywood's first important stab at dissecting the flaws in human nature that allowed the Holocaust.

The script, based on Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski's play, doesn't quite leave its stage origins behind, and at times there is an insularity to the action that isn't all about prison-camp realism. The plot is overneat, the comedy at times overdone (Robert Strauss and Harvey Lembeck are terrific as the wolfishly vulgar 'Animal' and his keeper Shapiro, but it's pure vaudeville); and though Holden is good he probably shouldn't have won his only Oscar as Sefton – he himself was reportedly furious, feeling that he should have got it for Sunset Blvd. two years earlier.

Still, the ensemble acting is very fine, even with Otto Preminger stealing scenes as the sarcastic camp commandant; the thriller elements grip; and the ending leaves the nagging unease that is as close as Wilder got to a trademark. **Disc:** Clean, sharp picture and sound. The commentary – by two of the cast and the co-author of the original play - is inconsequential but rather touching (especially given that two of the three have



Television

THE AVENGERS: SERIES 5

UK 1967-68; ABC/StudioCanal/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 960 minutes; 4:3; Features: audio commentaries, episode introductions by Brian Clemens, episode trims, 'Granada Plus Points' (onscreen factoids), stills galleries, 1960s German titles, archive German interview with Diana Rigg and Patrick Macnee, Diana Rigg interview, archive trailer, archive newsreel, retrospective featurette, reconstructions of missing episodes from Series 1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

As the first series of *The Avengers* in colour, and the last one before Diana Rigg shuffled off to be a Bond girl and traded Patrick Macnee for George Lazenby – by all accounts a poor swap – this represents a high point. The roster of acting and directing talent is extraordinary, with episodes directed by Charles Crichton and John Krish and guest spots for – to pick out a few personal favourites – John Wood, the great Beckett actor Jack MacGowran, Judy Parfitt and Peter Bowles. For sheer concentrated fabulousness I'd pick out the episode 'The Superlative Seven', which features Donald Sutherland as a trainer of invincible assassins *and* Charlotte Rampling dressed as a cowboy.

But the real action is, as always, the playful Rigg-Macnee double act. Macnee died at the end of June. Please don't take it as any kind of disrespect when I say that he was the Ernie Wise of the partnership — his steady, knowing smile and charm are an essential foundation; but Rigg, bubbling with beauty, intelligence and humour, is the show and she knows it.

Plausibility is rarely a consideration, and it's a shame the fight scenes are so undercooked — they could surely have afforded to give the stunt double the same haircut as Macnee. But it remains a bewitching example of television as style.

Disc: Sharp picture with gorgeous colours, though rather more mauve than good taste would demand. The extras are mostly dispensable, but the recent Rigg interview is good and the archive German TV interview is hilarious.

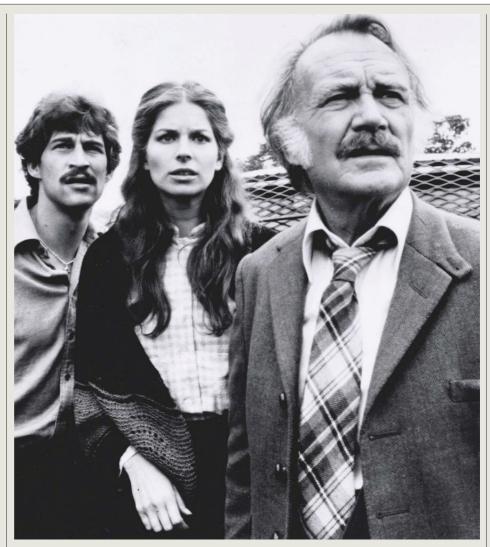
THE GAME

Niall MacCormick/Daniel O'Hara; UK 2014; BBC/2entertain/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 360 minutes; 16:9; Features: deleted scenes, cast and crew interviews

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

Originality is nice, but borrowing with taste is a good substitute. This BBC Cold War drama, set in a 1970s of strikes, power cuts and paranoia, leans heavily on the visual style of Tomas Alfredson's 2011 film of *Tinker Tailor Soldier Spy*: artfully framed static shots of bureaucratic settings, washed-out colours for the exteriors, a lot of institutional architecture and sideburns. It also has a very fine cast, with Brian Cox as MI5 chief 'Daddy', Victoria Hamilton as his ambitious deputy, Tom Hughes as the pretty-boy protagonist who may be a Soviet mole and, best of all, Paul Ritter as a waspish, blatantly closeted colleague.

All of that goes a long way to make up for a strenuously convoluted plot and outbreaks of wooden dialogue – Toby Whithouse, who created the BBC3 supernatural housemates drama *Being Human*, ought to know better. The script is also handicapped by some odd ideas about how intelligence works: nice to have Shaun Dooley along as a decent copper, to contrast with the



Quatermass The drama is flawed, unevenly paced and short on plausibility, but it is hard not to be drawn in by the crushingly apocalyptic atmosphere

devious, callous spies, but I'm not convinced that Special Branch – who were, after all, largely concerned with catching terrorists – were quite so easily shocked as we're meant to believe.

This is pastiche Le Carré, moral complexity and realism displaced by mannerism, but then you could say that about a lot of Le Carré. **Disc:** Excellent colour, verging on the cinematic, and OK sound. The best of the deleted scenes, interestingly, are the ones that round out Ritter's character.

JONATHAN STRANGE & MR NORRELL

Toby Haynes; RLJ Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray/ Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 420 minutes; Features: 'making of' shorts, 'making of' documentary, deleted scenes, bloopers, stills and picture gallery, subtitles

Reviewed by Kim Newman

That rare thing – a contemporary standalone fantasy novel (Susannah Clarke's 1,000-page tome) adapted into a well-budgeted television miniseries and treated by sole director Toby

Haynes with the high seriousness usually reserved for Hardy or Dickens. Even at seven hour-long episodes, Peter Harness's script has to prune characters, subplots and – sadly – the footnotes that fill out the alternate history supporting Clarke's intricate story tapestry.

During the Napoleonic Wars, the tradition of English magic – which was once all-pervasive but has died out – is revived by two contrasted magicians: the cautious, bookish, pedantic Gilbert Norrell (Eddie Marsan) and the impulsive, undisciplined, romantic Jonathan Strange (Bertie Carvel). They offer their services to the government, and Strange hares off to the Peninsular War – to be patronised even in success by a demanding Duke of Wellington (Ronan Vibert) – and Waterloo, while Norrell relies unwisely on London toadies (splendidly repulsive work from Vincent Franklin and John Heffernan) over a devoted servant (Enzo Cilenti).

Norrell also tries to keep secret the fact that his initial success was made possible by a dark pact with a sinister fairy (Marc

New releases

Warren) who has designs on Strange's wife (Charlotte Riley) and the wife (Alice Englert) and servant (Ariyon Bakare) of influential minister Sir Walter Pole (Samuel West).

Magic is made manifest, leaking from an otherland that evokes the behind-the-mirror world of Amicus's From Beyond the Grave. But this is at heart a story of personal and political intrigue, built around a fascinating relationship between colleagues who disagree violently yet are tragically unable to explain themselves to anyone else.

Disc: Features include deleted scenes (which would have allowed a minor character some breathing room), bloopers (mostly involving incontinent horses) and shorts showing how the effects were achieved. There is also a chatty 'making of' that gives an idea of the scale of the project.

QUATERMASS

Piers Haggard; UK 1979; Euston Films/Network/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 15; 200 minutes; 4:4. Features: 'The Quatermass Conclusion', episode recaps, textless title sequences, music-only option, image gallery, booklet

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

The last of Nigel Kneale's Quatermass dramas, shown on ITV at the tail end of the 1970s, is a bleak, almost despairing affair. Quatermass (John Mills) is now an old man, frightened and marginalised in a Britain that is falling apart. There are still TV studios making weirdly sexualised pop programmes, and observatories keeping an eye on events in space; but the cities are anarchic waste lands, where Morlocklike thugs lurk in derelict buildings and the privatised police force demands money at checkpoints. In the countryside, motorways are strewn with overturned cars and violent bands of young hippies are converging on ancient stone circles – they call themselves the 'Planet People' and believe they are going to be taken away, in a version of the rapture, to a better planet; Quatermass fears that his granddaughter may have joined them. When he witnesses one of the rapture events, he realises that alien beings are indeed involved – the youngsters are not being transported, though, but harvested.

The director is Piers Haggard, fresh from the original TV version of Dennis Potter's *Pennies from Heaven* and perhaps less at home with this material. Certainly the drama is immensely flawed, unevenly paced and short on plausibility, with third-rate special effects; but it is hard not to be drawn in by the crushingly apocalyptic atmosphere.

Kneale said he was simply taking to their logical conclusion tendencies already evident in society, but perhaps he was projecting something more personal. Though it is ostensibly a drama about the future, it feels more like a fable, or simply a cry of anguish, about ageing – the pain of seeing your world drained of familiarity, comprehensibility, hope.

Disc: Decent picture. The Quatermass

Conclusion is an abridged version of the four-part TV series for showing in cinemas, largely dismissed by fans. The music-only option is worthwhile for Nic Rowley and Marc Wilkinson's moody electronic score.

since died) and offers insights into what Wilder added to the Broadway play, his methods and manner on set and the personalities of some of the players (Preminger, fantastically difficult; Holden, terrific but already an alcoholic).

STATE OF GRACE

Phil Joanou; USA 1990; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 129 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: Phil Joanou interview 'Directing a Bunch of Gangsters: The Making State of Grace', Ed Harris interview

Reviewed by Philip Concannon

State of Grace failed to make an impact at the box office when it was released in 1990 and it has subsequently slipped out of the collective consciousness, which might seem like an odd fate to befall a film with such a high-calibre cast. Director Phil Joanou likes to pin the blame on Orion's financial woes and the glut of gangster-themed pictures that came out within the space of a few months, but the truth is that his film just doesn't have enough freshness or imagination to distinguish it from numerous others of this type.

Dennis McIntyre's screenplay about Irish mobsters in Hell's Kitchen has a few clever touches – such as a debate over ambiguously worded instructions building tension before an ambush. But the film settles too easily into a series of hoodlum clichés as it builds up to a bloody slow-motion shootout that takes place, of course, in a bar against the backdrop of a St Patrick's Day parade.

The more interesting aspect of the film is what's happening all around it. State of Grace was shot in New York in the summer of 1989, and it captures the city at a point of transition, with redevelopment and gentrification transforming the streets on which these gangsters ply their trade. "I don't even recognise the place. A bunch of yuppie condos?" complains Terry Noonan (Sean Penn) as he returns to the old neighbourhood after years away. "They could have left ten blocks for the Irish." Later in the film, Terry and his wild friend Jackie (Gary Oldman) burn down the construction site on which one of those yuppie condos is about to be built, but this feels like a futile act of defiance from characters who are facing the choice to adapt or die.

In this respect, ruthless mob boss Frankie (Ed Harris) emerges as the most compelling character in the film. He has 'escaped' to the suburbs and he harbours aspirations to power and respectability, but family loyalties and the code of the streets threaten to pull him back down. Harris gives a performance that details Frankie's conflict in subtle, sometimes affecting ways, and he deserved a larger chunk of the film's bloated running time, but Joanou appears to be too in thrall to Penn's various degrees of anguish and Oldman's loose-cannon showboating to notice him. **Disc:** Joanou is a candid and engaging talker and he reveals some interesting details in a 20-minute interview, notably an alternative opening scene that was excised after a disastrous test screening. The sharp transfer allows Jordan Cronenweth's atmospheric cinematography to shine.



Penn pals: State of Grace

STORY OF MY DEATH (HISTORIA DE LA MEVA MORT)

Albert Serra; Spain/France 2013; Second Run/Region 2 DVD; 144 minutes; Certificate 15; 2.35:1; Features: 'Cuba Libre' (Serra's 2013 tribute to Rainer Werner Fassbinder), booklet

Reviewed by Kim Newman

In the late 18th century, an ageing Casanova (Vicenç Altaió) and his Sancho Panza-like manservant Pompeu (Lluís Serrat) leave Switzerland for the Carpathians, where they put up with a dour, religious farmer (Xavier Pau) and his gaggle of female servants and relations. The famous libertine takes an interest in the women, though loitering nearby is a rival alpha-male predator, Count Dracula (Eliseu Huertas). The premise sounds ripe for a gruesome, comic romp like Paul Morrissey's Blood for Dracula (1974), or an exercise in archetype-mixing strangeness like Jesús Franco's Dracula-related films, but Story of My Death comes from the Catalan writer-director Albert Serra, prime exponent of Slow Cinema, who favours long takes on digital video, the use of non-professional actors, and poised tableaux rather than action scenes.

Here, Casanova is a powdered, tittering coprophile given to moments of private hilarity or despair, who strains over his own bowel movements and delves under a maid's skirts to prize an anus "like a rosary of bonbons", breaks a window with his head during the film's single conventional seduction and is manifestly slipping into his own interior world while great philosophical movements are changing Europe. Dracula, in contrast, is a white-bearded, bouffant-haired presence who wheedles around the woman he needs to bleed and utters cries of pain and terror on their behalf after biting them.

The women these creatures come across glumly submit – in one case, Casanova deflowers a girl with his fingers only for Dracula to steal in and lick up the blood – but have their own agenda for 'wickedness', which is as much about getting out from under patriarchs as becoming playthings.

Serra's approach risks ridicule – throughout the film, Casanova grazes on an endless variety of foods, including shit and blood, while acknowledging rather than contributing to philosophical debates... and the glowering Dracula is so austere a representation of vampirism that he makes Carl Dreyer's *Vampyr* (1932) seem like a Terence Fisher Hammer film. **Disc:** Serra's short film *Cuba Libre* is included as an extra. §

Lost and found

GWEN, THE BOOK OF SAND

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Full of dreamlike fancy, Jean-François Laguionie's auteur animation favours philosophy and imagination over incident and plot

By Alex Dudok de Wit

When Fantastic Planet was released in 1973, as he was later to recall, Jean-François Laguionie declared to his friends that feature-length animation had come of age. René Laloux's film was a challenging, independent work of art that spurned the conventions of mainstream cel animation and dealt in science fiction — a genre few French filmmakers dared to touch. It was animation as auteur cinema. From now on, one would go to see a Laloux movie as one did a Polanski or a Chabrol production.

Just over a decade later, after five years' intensive labour, Laguionie finished his own first animated feature. With its sedate pace, sci-fi premise and Dadaist flourishes, *Gwen, the Book of Sand* (1985) bears the stamp of Laloux's film, and is every bit as remarkable. But it would prove rather less fortunate: although it scooped up awards and critical plaudits, its experimental styling was a little too far out for the public, and its producers at Gaumont had no idea what to do with it. After a brief arthouse run the film was shelved, and it sank as if in quicksand.

Gwen is set in a post-apocalyptic future world in which the planet has been turned to desert. What's left of mankind is divided into two camps: a tribe of nomads who roam the sands, and a community of shadowy figures who live in the walled-off City of the Dead. At night, a strange orb sweeps across the sky, abducting people and depositing huge household objects — bathtubs, spectacles — in the desert. When it carries off a nomad boy, his friend Gwen sets off with a tribal elder to recover him from the City.

There's material here for an exciting adventure drama, but Laguionie has little interest in suspense, narrative or character. We never learn what caused the apocalypse, nor where the orb or objects come from. The protagonists have no backstory — we don't know why they look like Bedouins but bear Celtic names such as Gwen and Logan. Gwen's quest ends not with a tear-jerking reunion but with an eerie fireworks display that issues from nowhere. As in Studio Ghibli's Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind (released the previous year) there is an implied ecological message, but Laguionie is not one to labour a point, and the overriding mood is of poetic fancy and oneiric abandon.

Much of this is down to the singular animation, particularly Bernard Palacios's background art. Painted in gouache and filmed with a specially constructed multiplane camera, the backgrounds combine rich watercolour hues and great depth of field with surrealist, at times abstract compositions. Laguionie is fond of sparse



Nomads' land: Gwen, the Book of Sand

The stretches of desert serve as a blank mental canvas, on which Freudian objects are strewn

landscapes, and snow and open seas feature heavily in his films. Here, the stretches of desert serve almost as a blank mental canvas, on which Freudian objects are strewn as in a Dalí painting. The plot unfolds at a disjointed, dreamlike pace; in some scenes, we actually seem to be witnessing projections of the abducted boy's dreams.

So we are plunged into the characters' subconscious, and instead of action and incident the film explores imagination and philosophy. Like Laguionie's early shorts, *Gwen* is shot

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID

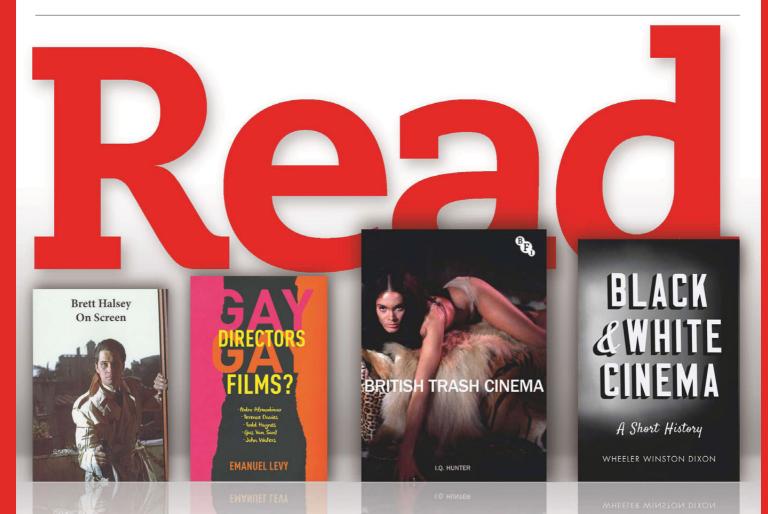


'A trance-like masterpiece. Laguionie used gouache, a medium that's a cross between watercolour and pastel, to create a breathtaking work of art that feels like a moving painting. Windswept

vistas are punctuated by radiantly colourful animals and the film exudes an air of melancholy mystery that is as close to pure poetry as cinema can get.' New York International Children's Film Festival March 20, 2010 through with a sense of cosmic loneliness: a fear of rejection, of never finding love. The characters wonder aloud whether their gods have deserted them; at one point, the elder tells Gwen, "I know nothing about love. Some say it's a deep solitude." But again, these metaphysical questions are delivered with a light touch; far from bogging the film down, they feel wholly natural in the context of its world.

Gwen is its own film, entirely confident in its approach – but commercial it is not. That it got made at all is in large part down to Laguionie's legendary determination, and his efficiency with costs: the film was made by a core team of five (later growing to eight), sequestered in a converted cloth factory in the Cévennes mountains. Credit is also due to the generous arts funding put in place by the Mitterrand government – as Palacios once explained to me, "It was a blessed era, when financiers were very patient with production delays." There are grounds to argue that Gwen was a product of its time, when the French state gave its full backing to auteur cinema; certainly, Laguionie's subsequent ventures have been altogether more market-friendly.

It's perhaps fitting that I've only ever watched this most intimate of films on my laptop, alone. Having scoured online stores in vain for an English-language edition — only in France does it have a DVD release, and cinema screenings on this side of the Channel are as rare as dodo sightings — I was gratified to stumble on a high-definition, fully subtitled version on YouTube. Once again, this valuable resource has reversed the fate of a vanishing classic, and what was almost lost has been unexpectedly found. §



BRETT HALSEY ON SCREEN

Edited by John B. Murray, Foreword by Brett Halsey, Quacks Books, 260pp, paperback, £10, ISBN 9781904446613 Brett Halsey started as a heart-throb in teen pictures (The Crv Baby Killer with Jack Nicholson, cult flick Speed Crazy), moved up to minor classic Return of the Fly with Vincent Price, then into the mainstream with pictures such as Return to Peyton Place, opposite Mary Astor. When film production boomed in Rome in the early 1960s, he was one of the Hollywood stars who migrated there, becoming a favoured leading man of Riccardo Freda, Mario Bava, Lucio Fulci and Dario Argento. John B. Murray has compiled a fascinating visual history of Halsey's long career. The book contains images of him with colleagues such as Tony Curtis, Broderick Crawford, Clint Eastwood, Dana Andrews and Susan Hayward. More than 380 black-and-white photos illustrate the unique range of his career.

More info at thessalypress.com

GAY DIRECTORS, GAY FILMS?

Pedro Almodóvar, Te<mark>rence D</mark>avies, Todd Haynes, Gus Van Sant, John Waters

By Emanuel Levy, Columbia University Press, 392pp, paperback, \$25 / £17.50, ISBN 9780231152778

Through intimate encounters with the life and work of five contemporary gay male directors, this book develops a framework for interpreting what it means to make a gay film or adopt a gay point of view. Combining critique with in-depth interviews conducted with each director, Emanuel Levy draws a clear timeline of gay filmmaking over the past four decades and its influences and innovations. He compares the 'North American' attitudes of Todd Haynes, Gus Van Sant and John Waters with the 'European' perspectives of Pedro Almodóvar and Terence Davies, developing a comprehensive, up-to-date approach to gay filmmaking in particular and auteur cinema in general.

bit.ly/1QM17Ak

BRITISH TRASH CINEMA

By I.Q. Hunter, BFI/Palgrave, 232pp, paperback, £19.99, ISBN 9781844574155 British Trash Cinema is the first overview of the wilder shores of British exploitation and cult paracinema from the 1950s onwards. From obscure horror, science fiction and sexploitation, to arthouse camp, Hammer's prehistoric fantasies and the worst British films ever made, author I.Q. Hunter draws on rare archival material and new primary research to take us through the weird and wonderful world of British trash cinema.

Beginning by outlining the definitions of trash films and their place in British film history, Hunter explores topics including Hammer's overlooked fantasy films, the emergence of the sexploitation film, Ken Russell's high camp gothic, gross-out comedies and contemporary straight-to-DVD horror and erotica.

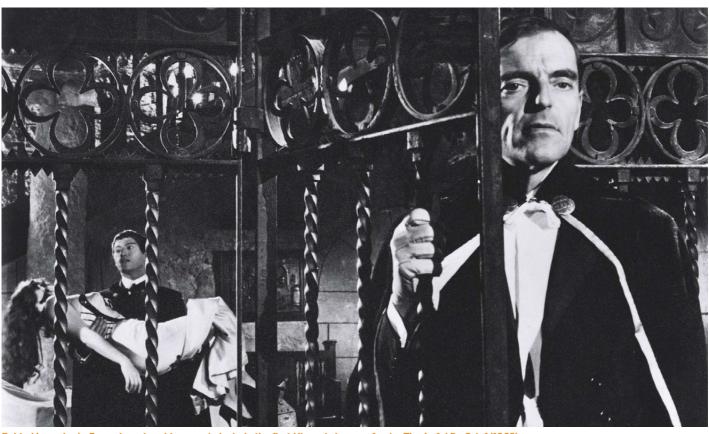
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BLACK & WHITE CINEMA

A Short History

By Wheeler Winston Dixon, I.B. Tauris, 256pp, paperback, £14.99, ISBN 9781784534523 Black-and-white film is a filmgoer's pleasure and a film student's surprised delight. The greatest of films are black and white, from Chaplin and Keaton, through iconic films noirs, up to the black-and-white rarities of modern cinema, from Raging Bull to The Artist. Featuring 40 illustrations, this is the first full account, critique and history of black-and-white film, which dominated the movies internationally over seven decades. Going behind the scenes with the directors and cinematographers, it reveals the art and craft of filming in blackand-white, and traces the fortunes of this unique medium through the history of the silver screen.

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Behind bars: Jesús Franco's early achievements include the first Hispanic horror of note, The Awful Dr. Orlof (1962)

METHOD IN HIS MADNESS

MURDEROUS PASSIONS

The Delirious Cinema of Jesús Franco, Volume 1: 1959-1974

By Stephen Thrower with Julian Grainger, Strange Attractor Press, 432pp, £50 (special edition)/ £40 (standard edition), ISBN 9781907222313

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

Jesús Franco Manera (born 1930), the hyperprolific Spanish purveyor of flesh and fantasy better known as Jess Franco, fashioned a singular cinematic universe of bizarre porno-horror hybrids and sleazy cross-genre mash-ups, such as *The Erotic Rites of Frankenstein* (1972), Lorna, the Exorcist (1974) and Two Female Spies with Flowered Panties (1978). Much derided as a crude schlockmeister by critics and genre fans alike, in a career stretching from his 1959 comedy-road-movie We Are 18 Years Old to the micro-budget Revenge of the Alligator Ladies (2013), realised in the year of his death, he created an oeuvre marked as much by its unfathomable vastness as its voyeuristic excess.

Franco took a peripatetic approach to his life and art, compulsively reworking the same

clutch of plots and themes in different countries, production circumstances and censorship climates. His output rolled out cyclically, with recurrent locations, archetypes and character names (Dr Orloff, Al Pereira, Lorna, Morpho) and an entourage of performers, musicians and other collaborators that mutated across the years, with Franco appearing almost as regularly in front of the camera as behind.

David Khune, Clifford Brown and Frank Hollmann were but a few of the pseudonyms under which he operated. Swiftly shot assignments for a parade of fly-by-night producers across Europe were released in a plethora of reedits and re-titlings depending on their markets, with post-production tinkering from producers, distributors and Franco himself further muddying the waters (he infamously shot two women-in-prison titles simultaneously without his cast, crew or financiers being aware of the fact).

All this makes gauging Franco's exact output a tricky business, although Stephen Thrower – whose 2007 book *Nightmare USA: The Untold Story of the Exploitation Independents* was a monumental trawl through American low-budget uber-schlock between 1970-85, represents another case of venturing where few critics would dare to tread – pinpoints the total at 173.

Franco's world is a labyrinthine domain. Thrower readily concedes that although few individual films stand up to scrutiny, when his body of work is taken as a whole, the seemingly slapdash technique betrays a method in the madness. Once a viewer is bitten by the bug, Franco's perfervid, pathological brand of cinephilia proves strangely beguiling, as in his quintessential *Vampyros Lesbos* (1971), a mesmerising sun-drenched subversion of horror conventions, with its Sapphic seductions amplified by exotic Istanbul locations and psychedelic lounge music.

Tim Lucas, contributor to an aptly titled 1993 monograph, *Obsession: The Films of Jess Franco*, said, "You can't see one Franco film until you've seen them all." Thrower has taken Lucas at his word with *Murderous Passions*. While there have already been several attempts to subject the director's lifelong project to the same scrutiny (notably Carlos Aguilar's *Jess Franco: el sexo del horror* from 1999), I doubt we'll see a more exhaustive and lavishly illustrated study than this.

Volume I (the second is expected next year) covers the first half of Franco's evolving ocuvre—arguably the most interesting period, before he became mired in a morass of outand-out pornography. Opening with a lengthy

introduction and tail-ended by an interview with the director and an appendix 'Franco at the BBFC' (to which he proved a particular bête noire), it boasts detailed synopses, production notes, in-depth analyses, comparisons of different versions and contemporary press quotes for all his works, including several aborted projects. Additional essays by Julian Grainger on career turning points, such as Franco's acquaintance with Orson Welles (in 1964-65 he worked as second-unit director on Chimes at Midnight) and his stint with the Liechtenstein-based British mogul Harry Alan Towers, renowned for the creative accountancy of his pan-European co-productions, contribute to this compelling portrait of a strain of European exploitation that proliferated during the 60s and 70s.

Setting out at a relatively sedate pace of three to four more commercially oriented titles a year in his native Spain – musicals such as La reina del Tabarín (1960) and the classical Hollywood homage Vampiresas 1930 (1961) – Franco was singled out as one to watch by local critics. Early achievements include the first Hispanic horror of note, The Awful Dr. Orlof (Gritos en la noche, 1962), and the French co-productions The Diabolical Dr. Z(1966) and the Alphaville-inspired Attack of the Robots (1966), penned by Buñuel collaborator Jean-Claude Carrière. Already under fire during his namesake General Franco's regime, due to his penchant for grotesquery and a fixation on the female form, increased financing opportunities from the more liberal territories of France, Italy and Germany (where his films were spiced up with nude inserts) saw the director casting his eye further afield.

Franco's snowballing output was fuelled by an impulse to work continuously. His association with Towers resulted in nine films in two-and-a-half years, with name stars and his biggest budgets to date: an adaptation of De Sade's *Justine* in 1968 featured Klaus Kinski and Jack Palance; he contributed two films to Towers's series starring Christopher Lee as the Chinese master fiend Fu Manchu (1968-69); and there was the misfired attempt with Lee to create the definitive screen version of Bram Stoker's novel with *Count Dracula* (1970).

The rapid turnaround saw Franco shooting footage for one production while still working on another, and honing a trademark aesthetic featuring restless one-take fixed-camera positions that became ever more feverish in his porno cheapies of the 1970s, a period when he shot much of his work himself. Franco's over-reliance on the zoom (with his oft-noted variant on the fadeout by zeroing in on his leading ladies' crotches) has opened him to charges of amateurism, but to Thrower, it is in such time-bending "purposefully out-of-focus shots, with their impressionistic sensuality" that much of Franco's charm lies.

Franco's films are never going to appeal to everyone – and the author takes their philistine approach to sexual violence to task at several points – but Thrower's fastidious eye for detail and compelling, often witty writing style provides an enticing open door into this perplexing, self-contained mirror maze of unearthly desires.

THE NEW SCOTTISH CINEMA

By Jonathan Murray, I.B. Tauris, 288pp, £62, ISBN 9781845118617

By Hannah McGill

For those resident in Scotland, and anyone based beyond its borders who is attentive to its politics and culture, questions concerning what constitutes Scottishness have been much to the fore over recent months. The shift that has been simplistically portrayed in press coverage as a "surge of nationalism", to be lamented in the same breath as gains by the far-right UK Independence Party, has in fact comprised a serious and exacting national conversation about the extent to which Scotland can and should regard itself as different from 'rUK' (as online referendumspeak termed the rest of the United Kingdom). Meanwhile, older artists and commentators preoccupied by Scotland's historical underrepresentation within the UK arts scene have come up against a post-Trainspotting, post-Turner Prize generation to whom Scottish culture appears far from marginalised.

Against this backdrop, it's all the more interesting to contemplate Jonathan Murray's thorough and thoughtful examination of recent cinema from – or about, or linked to – Scotland. Murray's identification of a specific gear-shift in Scottish cinema between the early 1990s and the start of the 2010s – a burst of creativity, a broadening of opportunities, a new confidence in the claiming of stories – carries an implicit question about what makes a film Scottish. Rarely, in these days of globalised funding streams and peripatetic creators, is any film a pure breed; so can the films about which Murray writes be said to share an identifiable sensibility based on the fact that some part of their funding or some significant element of their creative team was sourced from Scotland? Or are they discrete entities that have been gathered for analysis simply by virtue of having a little common DNA?



Lynne Ramsay's Morvern Callar

The premise of a book like this can't help but stir such questions and, sensibly, Murray doesn't endeavour to provide a definitive answer: he writes on films with some element of Scottishness about them, and that's enough to draw together a useful and highly readable account of one small nation's recent production history. Murray's histories and critiques of selected films are both diligent and likeably discursive: he is an astute writer whose openminded attention extracts intriguing detail from films, many of which were critically dismissed at their time of release. Indeed, Murray is unfashionably and pleasingly optimistic in general about a film culture notoriously prone to negativity and self-criticism. Though he has the odd helping of measured criticism for unhelpful funding strategies, creatively unsuccessful films and misguided critics, his book is not a call to arms about the way things should be, nor a plea for undervalued texts to be reconsidered. Rather, it dusts off and examines certain films with close reference to the specific political, financial and creative climates in which they were created. If a lack of box-office success

Murray resists the tendency to view Scotland's every cultural utterance through the lenses of class and national identity

tends to unite most of the titles he considers, he nonetheless finds much to discuss, and is assertive in countering the frequent assumption that Scottish cinema has been in a slump of late.

Murray also resists the widespread and limiting tendency to view Scotland's every cultural utterance through the smeary twin lenses of class and national identity. His interests are broader, though not haphazard. The comparative influences of American and European cinematic traditions on Scottish film figures large in his theses (he perceives a far stronger flavour of the former than the latter, even in celebrated pieces of moody arthouse such as Ratcatcher and The Magdalene Sisters), as does the treatment of race and ethnicity; gender, both in front and behind the camera; Scotland's low-budget genre scene, which is more active than the casual observer might suppose; and the influence of co-production endeavours, such as the long-running partnership between Denmark's Zentropa studio and Glasgow's Sigma Films. He turns his critical eye on both the lionised – Morvern Callar (2001), Red Road (2006), The Last King of Scotland (2006) – and the less so: Charlotte Gray (2001), Cargo (2006), Nina's Heavenly Delights (2006). If Murray is perhaps unlikely to convince anyone that the uneven outcropping of films he identifies for study bears real comparison to the New German Cinema his title references, his book is still a timely, challenging and highly readable companion to Scotland's recent film activity, which will be of considerable value to practitioners, theorists and social media combatants alike. 9

THE EDGE IS WHERE THE CENTRE IS

David Rudkin and Penda's Fen: A Conversation

Edited by Gareth Evans, Will Fowler and Sukhdev Sandhu, Texte und Töne, 80pp

Reviewed by Nick James

I can't pretend to be objective towards a document published to celebrate *Penda's Fen*, the film directed by Alan Clarke – his least typical work – from the screenplay by David Rudkin. My own cherishing of this rarely seen film was attested when I took it to the Telluride Film Festival for a one-off screening in 2011, introducing it with an altitude-deranged encomium less detailed than these zealous essays from Sukhdev Sandhu (a regular *S&S* contributor), Gareth Evans (lightning rod of left-field events) and Will Fowler (a BFI colleague).

The film, shot on 16mm film for a 1974 slot on the BBC's *Play for Today*, concerns Stephen, the son of a vicar, in his last days at school, who's obsessed by Elgar's choral work *The Dream of*

Gerontius and who begins to have visions that see, in Rudkin's words, "his idealistic value system, and the precious tokens of his selfimage all broken away". It is an intense, bizarre, Blakean evocation of 'old weird Britain' that could only have been made in the 1970s when Nic Roeg and Ken Russell were redefining British cinema and poet Geoffrey Hill's Mercian Hymns tapped into similar ancient energies.

This two-colour screen-print-effect booklet (available from the Whitechapel Gallery) is itself a tribute to radical 70s publications and centres on a long interview with Rudkin, conducted by Evans and Fowler. Around that there's Sandhu's typically eloquent introductory paean — describing Northern Irishman Rudkin as "exceptionally attuned to the frequency emitted by ancient struggles, violent heresies, dissensual antagonisms" — plus facsimiles of pages on which Rudkin helped plan *Penda's Fen*, Fowler's digest of other cinema works of the time that divined for mythic British sources, and Evans's poetic excavation of the rest of Rudkin's somewhat neglected *oeuvre*.

Rudkin himself is very exact about the very different TV world of the time, careful to avoid claiming too much, admitting that *Penda's Fen*



Penda's Fen

"does give people who approached television, even in the 1970s, with a very journalistic set of expectations, some difficulty". In Telluride, for instance, director Alexander Payne told me he thought it was "like a student film". I disagree, profoundly. We need to see *Penda's Fen* brought out on DVD or made available as a download, not least for its anomalous nature. As Rudkin says, "This is from Alan Clarke, who would never have believed he would find himself showing a fucking angel, for God's sake, in a meadow." §

FROM DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

Perspectives on Film Preservation and Restoration

Edited by Rajesh Devraj, Film Heritage Foundation, 136pp, £29.99, ISBN 9789352120086

Reviewed by Michael Ewins

As in many postcolonial countries, the acquisition, preservation and restoration of national cinema has not historically been a priority in India, with government spending dedicated to architectural and agricultural development, education and business. India's film heritage – the largest in the world – is now largely extirpated, and the classics that remain have been saved by visionary independents such as P.K. Nair, founder of the National Film Archive of India (NFAI), and Shivendra Singh Dungarpur, whose not-for-profit Film Heritage Foundation was established in 2014. Expanding their mission to raise awareness about the preservation of Indian film, From Darkness into Light is its inaugural Englishlanguage publication (available by emailing contact@filmheritagefoundation.co.in, and from the BFI Shop), and accessibly primes readers on the technical, economic and ethical challenges facing the modern archivist.

Edited by Rajesh Devraj, the book surveys the role of the archivist in both practical and philosophical terms, collecting statistics and examples from leading preservationists and historians, and assessing the shifting priorities at play within the industry. It is in light of these that Devraj and Dungarpur have attempted to take stock of the tools and principles that guide today's archivist, and if Giovanna Fossati's From *Grain to Pixel* remains the most rigorous written account of digital restoration in the English language, From Darkness into Light is valuably differentiated by its empathetic and emotional approach to what has previously been a strictly academic topic – and with the authority and acumen of its 13 international authors (including Martin Scorsese, the Imperial War Museum's head of digital collections David Walsh and Dungarpur himself), it's one of the most diverse collections ever published on the subject.

In the book's first section, 'Global Views', Devraj arranges a collection of contemporary perspectives on preservation and archiving, and best among them is Peter Bagrov's essay 'Restoration: A Film Historian's Point of View'. Through three case studies he highlights the importance of historical research to restorers, especially in instances where autobiographical accounts misrepresent or misremember the colour, light and texture of film, or the details of footage that may exist on multiple negatives (Bagrov is quick to point out that many countries adopted the practice of editing two negatives: one for domestic, and another for foreign distribution). The BFI's own Robin Baker offers a detailed commentary on the recent restorations

With the authority and acumen of its 13 international authors, it's one of the most diverse collections ever published on the subject



Satyajit Ray's Aparajito

of Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films, considering the politics of restoration through the practicalities of fundraising, marketing and the potential for exhibition. Walsh, meanwhile, in 'Film Forever?', asks an even more practical set of questions about the aesthetic value of digital, examining what the preservation conditions for master copies of endangered films should be, and whether the future for digital and acetate-based film is any closer to a point of stability.

The second section, 'Indian Beginnings', collects essays on the work undertaken by Indian archivists. 'Film Preservation in India' by Nair, recounts his efforts throughout the 1960s and 70s to trace missing classics and build a centre for their preservation; while 'The Magic Of Celluloid', by Dungarpur, offers a more romantic plea for archiving, and encompasses his experiences making the 2012 documentary Celluloid Man, in which he meets a silver scavenger who strips 1,000kg of film in one day – that's 50 films lost for 3kg of silver, to make bracelets and other jewellery. Including lavish illustrations of silent Indian films, and examples of largely forgotten directors such as Dadasaheb Phalke (who made the first full-length Indian feature Raja Harishchandra, 1913), these chapters will be invaluable to readers whose knowledge of Indian film is limited to Satyajit Ray or Ritwik Ghatak. They also highlight the need for further education on the country's cinema, its political and aesthetic merit, and how the few remnants of its first century might be acquired, researched and restored.

Fittingly, the book ends with an essay by Criterion's technical director Lee Kline, who has supervised the vaunted 4K restoration of Ray's Apu Trilogy (*Pather Panchali*, 1955; *Aparajito*, 1956; *Apur Sansar*, 1958). His account of the painstaking effort taken to rescue these cornerstones of Indian cinema is an important insight into the time and economics required to give just three films the chance of surviving for another generation, and hopefully the success of their upcoming worldwide reissue will raise enough awareness to allow other neglected Indian treasures the same opportunity. §

ORSON WELLES'S LAST MOVIE

The Making of the Other Side of the Wind

By Josh Karp, St. Martin's Press, 352pp, \$26.99, ISBN 9781250007087

ORSON WELLES: POWER. HEART. AND SOUL

F.X. Feeney, The Critical Press, 410pp, £25, ISBN 9781941629086

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In death, as in life, everyone wants a piece of Orson Welles. This state of affairs is encouraged by the fact that he left so much of himself lying around to quibble over. Not finished films, of course – there are 12 completed features, and that number has not changed since his death in 1985, though many now exist in proliferating alternative versions. In fact, a whole field of scholarship has been devoted to the projects left incomplete, the detritus Welles left behind during a lifetime of constant creation, even his palaver, the gift that incontestably never left him – for like Henry James, another oft-broad American artist of not inconsiderable self-regard, Welles was frequently asked to sing for his supper.

In 2013 two Welles-in-conversation collections appeared: Peter Biskind and Henry Jaglom's My Lunches with Orson and Todd Tarbox's Orson Welles and Roger Hill: A Friendship in Three Acts. Now, among the latest Wellesiana are two new volumes of critical biography, which are each to varying degrees defined by their dedication to an incomplete Welles film.

Josh Karp's Orson Welles's Last Movie is a blow-by-blow, cheque-by-cheque, contract-bycontract and breach-by-breach account of the last Welles project to come near to completion, during its near-decade-long transatlantic production and postproduction, and its unquiet afterlife, which has only gotten more restless in the years since Welles's death. The most recent item of note was an attempt to raise a million dollars towards finishing the film on the crowdsourced fundraising site Indiegogo, spearheaded by Filip Jan Rymsza of Los Angeles's Royal Road Entertainment, who appears in the final pages of Karp's book, and who seemed perhaps to be counting on a heightened public profile in the wake of its publication to help meet its fundraising goals. (It didn't work - the campaign made less than half of its target.)

Orson Welles: Power, Heart, and Soul, a less high-profile project, is the work of F.X. Feeney, a Los Angeles-based journalist and screenwriter who adapted Welles's screenplay *The Big Brass Ring* into the version completed by director George Hickenlooper in 1999.

For those who are interested, Feeney offers a complete accounting of his engagement with *The Big Brass Ring* in the last chapters of his book, including a justification for whatever liberties he took with Welles's script. Of probable greater interest to the general reader, and the organising idea that most distinguishes Feeney's work from the teetering heaps of existing Welles scholarship, is his application to Welles of what James biographer Leon Edel regarded as his subject's mythic self-image, focusing particular attention on Welles's never-realised political ambitions, encouraged by a close early relationship with



Masked man: Orson Welles was 'looking to conquer life, not movies'

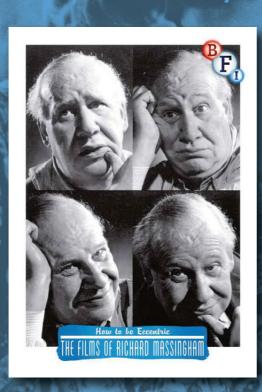
Franklin D. Roosevelt. "He was looking to conquer life, not movies," Feeney posits, shortly before launching into a marvellous retelling of Welles's use of his post-war radio platform, ABC Radio's Orson Welles Commentaries, to bring nationwide attention to the case of Isaac Woodard, Jr, an African-American veteran returning to his South Carolina home after serving in the South Pacific who was blinded with a blackjack by a white police officer, Lynwood Shull, who went unpunished. Following the lead of Jim McBride and Jonathan Rosenbaum – Feeney is highly conscious of his predecessors, and at one point runs through his own pantheon of best and worst – he regards Welles's European period as a self-imposed protest-by-way-of-exile, and emphasises Welles as a species of political artist, or at least an artist whose power was rooted in sublimated political ambition.

Power, Heart, and Soul offers a complete career overview, only somewhat marred by the overlong digression into The Big Brass Ring's production history – part and parcel with a penchant for autobiographical asides, for Feeney has it that Welles biographers "are all sorting out their identities in relation to this masked man" – and the evident absence of a strong editorial hand. Orson Welles's Last Movie, by contrast, compresses the whole of Welles's productive creative career

A whole field of scholarship has been devoted to the detritus Welles left behind during a lifetime of constant creation into a single chapter ('Orsonology: what you must know'), concentrating instead on an indepth retelling of the story of *The Other Side of the Wind*, which stretches from the first 1970 meeting between Welles and Gary Graver, the film-that-wouldn't-be's DP and something like the tragic martyr and secret hero of the book, to the posthumous labyrinth-without-a-centre through which the movie's fragments are still scattered.

Karp makes his gravest misstep right out of the gate, attempting the party trick of approximating Welles's voice, speaking from beyond the grave and laying the scene of his own death for the reader. Once Karp launches into his story in earnest and is restricted to the available facts, gathered through a notunimpressive amount of original research, his narrative settles in. The passages that offer insight into Welles's working method, discussing the particular cult of personality with which he ensorcelled collaborators such as Graver and Peter Bogdanovich, and the sullen, pouty depressive spells to which he was prone, are often insightful and enlightening. (Of particular interest is Karp's tracking of the growth of The Other Side of the Wind's cast, which metamorphosed in accordance with Welles's grudges and hang-ups of the moment.) Those sections of the book that deal with legal wranglings, money wires and contractual quibbling are alternately dull and frustrating, as perhaps such material can't help but be, but are nevertheless essential to sorting out 'whatever happened to ...?' With no new complete Welles films forthcoming, we may take solace in the fact that he had the courtesy to leave behind material for a small library. 9



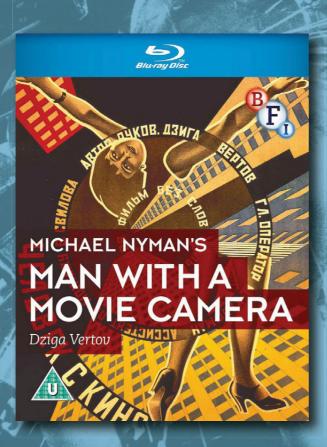


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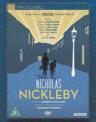




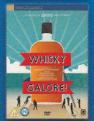






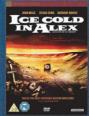






































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READERS' LETTERS

Letters are welcome, and should be addressed to the Editor at Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London WIT ILN Fax: 020 7436 2327 Email: S&S@bfi.org.uk

THE LOST PRINCE

I was pleased to see a report on the George Eastman House weekend of nitrate prints (Primal Screen, S&S, July). However, I was puzzled as to why it was included under 'The World of Silent Cinema', given that all the titles mentioned were of films with soundtracks. The July issue did cover the silent era, in the form of a review of The First Film, a documentary about Louis Le Prince, who shot film in Leeds in 1888, and a more detailed profile of this pioneering filmmaker would have been welcome – after all, you have run a number of such profiles over the last year. Up here in Yorkshire we are extremely miffed by your oversight.

MODERN TIMES

The usually excellent editorial fell somewhat flat in August ('Holding the centre', S&S), not helped by a range of questionable assumptions.

Your description of the Conservatives as a southern party is at odds with what actually happened on election night in May. Look at the electoral map and you will see that the party now dominates the Midlands, the East of England, much of Wales, and even the most northern constituencies in England, Berwick-upon-Tweed and Carlisle.

The wider point you made, that London is indeed increasingly expensive and gentrified, is true but surely not a mystery. Property in the capital has been a secure and successful investment for the past two decades, and is likely to remain so with the ongoing failure to build sufficient housing to meet demand.

Nevertheless, we should be cautious about harking back to the past. It is thanks to significant investment in infrastructure and modernisation that London has become arguably the most popular and successful city in the world.

With other forms of entertainment, such as topflight football, we rightly no longer accept shabby facilities. New cinemas, in London or elsewhere, reflect the willingness of consumers to pay for a more appropriate and welcoming environment in which to enjoy their cultural experiences. **Scott Colvin** *London*

JUMPING FOR JOY

Joy: what a delight to read such a positive response to *Inside Out* ("Tales of ordinary sadness", *S&S*, August)!

Anger: no doubt we'll now have to live through months of merchandising hell, as Pixar churns out a new range of expensive cuddly toys.

Fear: I hope my boy wants Joy for Christmas, and not any of the others. **Jeremy Grant** *Leicestershire*

NOT CUT AND DRIED

Mark Cousins's enthusiasm for female film editors is infectious ('Scissor sisters', S&S, August), but the story is perhaps a little more ambiguous than he indicates. It was, after all, Viola Lawrence

LETTER OF THE MONTH THE PRICE OF CHANGE



There is another part to the conundrum about the changing cinema scene referred to in your editorial ('Holding the centre', S&S, August), and it is touched upon in the same issue by Edward Lawrenson in his piece 'Farewell, Leicester Square': traditional cinemas need to maintain and grow their audience because younger consumers, increasingly used to viewing on portable devices at a convenient time, are less likely to acquire the habit of going to a building – no matter how plush – to watch a film at a time dictated to them.

While it is true that the older rich can afford expensive seats in 'smart' arthouse cinemas, some of us prefer this as a treat rather than the norm; rising seat prices do still have an adverse impact. And of course, we won't always be around. So the dilemma that could lead to further cinema closures is that the less well-off, and less mobile, older audiences no longer attend, while the young prefer their downloads. I wonder too whether small auditoria such as the 28/30 seaters aren't also having to compete with 'serious' home cinema.

The arthouse sector needs to take note though: Odeon cinemas, which are very senior friendly, are already reducing some of their off-peak seat prices and, at least in the West End of London, increasingly show some arthouse/independent titles, whereas the Curzon chain has embraced more populist Hollywood fare, while increasing prices and shrinking the off-peak period. Anecdotally, this may be in part to recover refurbishment and additional staffing costs following post-unionisation wage increases, but whatever the reason, the cinema is no longer such an obvious place to visit as regularly in these austere times.

Incidentally, you mention local campaign groups trying to hold back the tide of blandness, but I wonder how many of these have approached their local authorities to have their cinemas registered as ACVs (assets of community value) in the way that some pubs are now being protected? That, too, may be a way to hold back the developers.

David Sharp London

who helped to mutilate *The Lady from Shanghai* so ruthlessly, a task she apparently needed no encouragement to undertake. As a result, one can only dream of what Michael O'Hara and George Grisby's ascent of that urban hill, passing through *favelas* on the way to the crucial proposition, would have been like in Welles's vision. **Grahame Smith** *Stirling*

RING MASTER

While welcoming Ben Walters's piece on Orson Welles ('Rare genius: The Other Side of Orson Welles', S&S, July), I was surprised at an omission (admittedly, a film made after Welles's death): the US-made but heavily British cast *The Big Brass Ring* (1999) directed by George Hickenlooper, starring William Hurt and based on an original idea of Welles's.

While the portrayal of Missouri elite politics is

over-liberalised and over-tolerant, it is a refutation of the view that Welles was latterly talentless. The script is beautiful, a story of the frail nature of the US capitalistic and patriarchal dream worthy of the high standards of the early Welles of *Citizen Kane*, or the later *The Trial*, with its largely French cast. It shows Orson never 'lost it' creatively, and that his country was more foolish for losing him to Europe because of his justified contempt for America's pedestrian, mechanical filmmaking. **L. Irvine lies** *Eastbourne*

Additions and corrections

July p.106 A full English-language edition of the book Charlie Chaplin: The Keystone Album'is available from Editions Xavier Barral August p.66 Best of Enemies, Certificate 15, 88m, 13s; p.73, Going Clear Scientology & the Prison of Belief, Certificate 15, 12om 28s; p.77 Iris, Certificate 12A, 79m 54s; p.79 The Legend of Barney Thomson, Certificate 15, 96m 9s; p.62 Püt Quinquin, Certificate 15, 197m 43s; p.83 The Reunion, Certificate 15, 90m 9s; p.84 Ruth & Alex, Certificate 12A, 92m 21s; p.89 Ted 2 Certificate 15 115m 30s

ENDINGS..

NIGHTMARE ALLEY



Edmund Goulding's 1947 film distils the essence of *noir*, in a denouement steeped in madness, failure and squalor

By Michael Atkinson

Uber-genre that it may be, *noir* is not famous for peaking with masterpieces – instead, it's a massive aggregate of glower. Being a uniquely social and organic manifestation, redolent with cultural dread and historical anxiety, the genre is best viewed as a whole. Some *noir* entries hum, others limp, but together they constitute a single statement that no individual film could possibly make.

But of course within that cataract some films throb with a surfeit of eloquence, weirdness or transgression; Edmund Goulding's Nightmare Alley (1947) oozes with all three. It's a very different kind of post-war Hollywood movie — a morality fable of hustler cannibalism set in a neglected endless America of carny misery, between-towns lostness, souls ground for dog food. (It's the closest a mid-century film ever came to capturing the doomed nowhere vibe of nomadic junkiedom, without ever mentioning dope.)

Conceived with such cayenne acidity that it makes your eyes water (Jules Furthman's script is alarmingly faithful to William Lindsay Gresham's black marble of a novel), the film culminates in a descent to the depths that is still shocking. In 1947, even beside the noir rush of Out of the Past, Ride the Pink Horse, Crossfire, Brute Force, Kiss of Death, et al, it must've felt like touching an infected wound.

Welcome to the geek. Tyrone Power is Stan, the amoral hunk of a drifter with bright but shallow eyes, taking work as a mentalist's assistant in a two-bit carnival and "fascinated" by the outfit's geek – in its original meaning, a bottom-feeding sideshow alky enacting a wild-man routine for appalled ticket-buyers, biting the heads off chickens. Goulding never shows the geek; we see the barker say, "Folks, it's feeding time," and drop the birds into the geek pit. A feral growl, and the crowd screams. The geek, or geekdom, is the story's Gomorrahite motif, an abhorrent spectre to which the antihero's saga inevitably returns. When the geek finally loses it and escapes wailing into the night ("He's got the heebie-jeebies again"), Stan asks, "Who was he?" "Used to be plenty big time," he's told. "A mental act?" he asks, sensing the risks. "What's the difference?" is the reply.

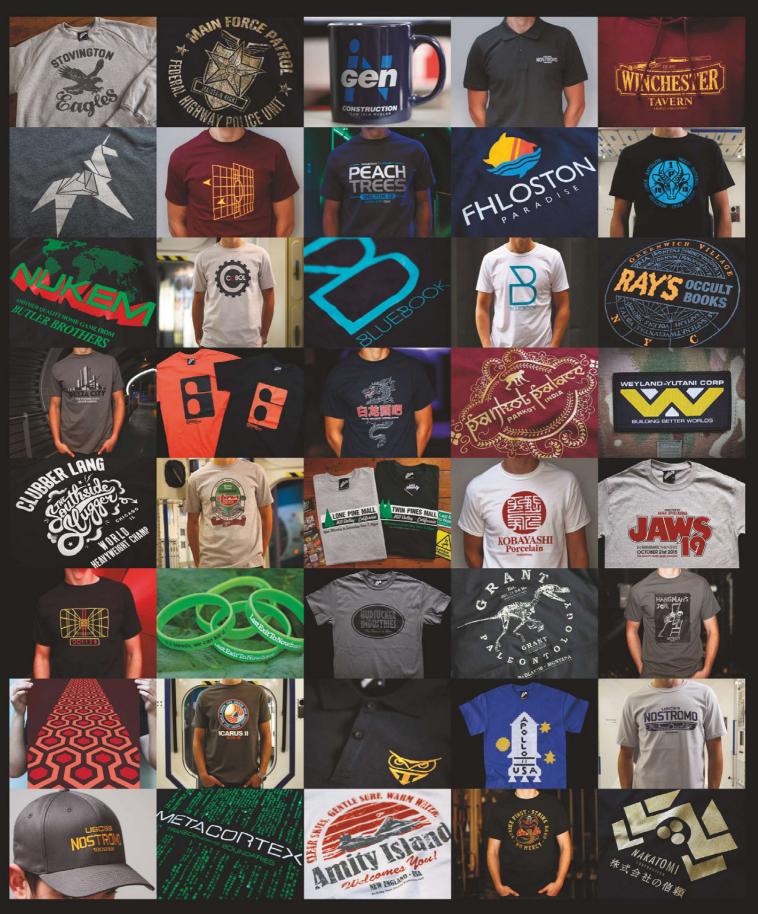
Stan works the carnival women, primarily Joan Blondell's mind-reader, entranced by her act's inherent dishonesty and power, and from there connives and backstabs his way to high-priced nightclubs with a telepathy act. His path is accompanied on one side by Colleen Gray's slutty but innocent — and it turns out — God-fearing nubile (a plot to fake communication with a millionaire's dead daughter finally compels her to run; "You think God will stand for that?" she cries), and on the other by Helen Walker's Lilith, the Machiavellian

Stan goes mad in a flash, shrieking in the night, a deranged haunter hiding on the misty carnival grounds psychotherapist who feeds her patients' secrets into Stan's act and schemes to commit Stan to an asylum when their conspiracy is exposed.

Thus does Stan run for his life in the film's last act, escaping under the surface of society, swollen with booze and self-hate (Power's worn-out make-up is unpleasantly convincing), and ending up a yarning bum under a rail bridge. It's a small step from there to another carnival, and the offer of a job: "Just temporary," the new boss tells Stan, as he shudders over a blast of whiskey, "until we get a real geek."

This line stands uncontextualised in the movie, but in Gresham's book it's the standard bullshit line carnies used to feed every chickenbiting applicant – there is no 'real' geek, just the defiled loser they can bribe in the moment to destroy himself over a daily bottle. And then comes the film's simple, brutally cold climax: whatever the job's circumstances, Stan's in. "Mister," Power groans, looking up from under ten-pound-sandbag eyelids, "I was made for it."

The coda after that goes from horrific to fakehopeful, as so many *noir*s do; the genre could take as one of its axioms that the last 60 seconds will struggle to turn optimistic what the film's entirety had already proven was fated and despairing. Stan too goes mad in a flash, shrieking in the night, a deranged haunter hiding on the misty carnival grounds. ("Where's the straitjacket?" someone yells – the straitjacket every carnival keeps for just such an occasion.) Gray's goodhearted maiden recognises him - no one else did – and they embrace. But the promise of love curdles; we'd seen how Blondell's identical bond with an old rummy (Ian Keith) ended in pitiful squalor and death. That's their only possible future. For geeks, that's all that's left. 9



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